DESCENDER™

COMPENDIUM

JEFF LEMIRE
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DESCENDER

IMAGE COMICS Presents

DESCENDER

COMPENDIUM

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DESCENDER COMPENDIUM
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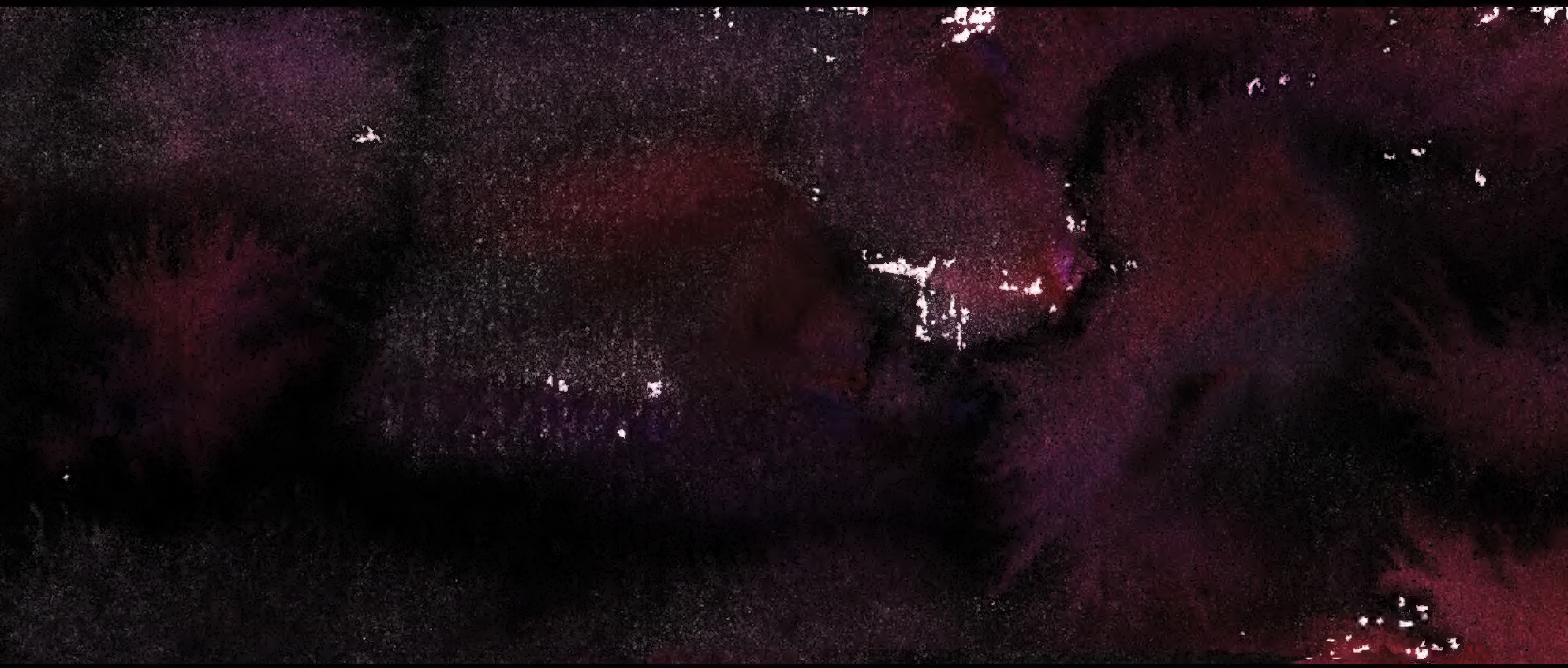

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CHAPTER I

THE PLANET NIYRATA.

Niyrata is the technological and cultural hub of the group of nine Core Planets known as The United Galactic Council.

Niyrata is also home to the nine Embassy Cities. One city state for each of the core planets and species representing the UGC.

Current population:
5.53 Billion

--I DON'T CARE WHAT THE GNISHIANS SAY, THAT COLONY BELONGS TO SAMPSON! ITS RESOURCES ARE OURS TO EXPLOIT AS WE SEE FIT! WE HAVE THE UGC'S BACKING HERE, DOCTOR TELLUN!
That's all well and fine to say--kzzt--but there--kzzt--!
--WHAAA!!
Shhh-- it's all right, mommy is just on the com, dear... hush now.
--WHAAAA!
--kzzt--
WHAAAA!!!
WOULD YOU QUIET HER DOWN! I'M-- I'M--
--But, Ma'am...
--Look. Above...
WHAT-- WHAT IS THAT?

--EEP! EEP!
--EEP! EEEP!
Excuse me Dr. Quon, but you have a Priority One hail from the United Galactic Council.
SHUT THAT DAMN ALARM OFF. WHAT TIME IS IT?
It is currently nine forty-six UGC time.

UGH. PROJECT THE COMM.
--QUON! **WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?** WHY HAVEN'T YOU BEEN ANSWERING OUR HAILS?!
GENERAL NAGOKI. I'M SORRY, SIR! I WAS IN THE LAB ALL NIGHT AND--
I DON'T CARE! HAVEN'T YOU BEEN OUTSIDE?!
:SIGH: NO, WHAT NOW? ARE THE GNISHIANS BLOCKADING THE NIYRATIAN SPACEWAY AGAIN?
THIS IS **NOT** THE GNISHIANS!--WE NEED YOU, DOCTOR. GET TO CENTRAL TERMINAL **NOW!**
OH!

"--WHAT DO WE KNOW?"
"NOTHING, DOCTOR. OUR SENSORS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO PENETRATE THEIR OUTER SHELLS."
--OUR COMMS ARE NOT BEING ANSWERED. IT SEEMS--WELL, IT SEEMS TOTALLY DORMANT.
THE COUNCIL IS IN A PANIC, THEY'VE SCRAMBLED ALL AVAILABLE UGC WARSHIPS AND ARE WAITING TO LAUNCH A FULL ASSAULT IF WE CAN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT THE HELL THESE THINGS ARE.
MY GOD!
GOD? I DON'T THINK SO, DOCTOR QUON...

...IT'S A MACHINE.

AND NOT **JUST** A MACHINE, QUON. THAT IS A **ROBOT.**
BUT I-- I DON'T-- YOU SAID THERE WERE OTHERS?
THERE ARE **EIGHT MORE** OF THESE THINGS, ORBITING THE OTHER EIGHT KEY WORLDS OF THE UGC. NOT IDENTICAL, BUT VERY SIMILAR IN SIZE AND SHAPE.
GENERAL NAGOKI, SURELY YOU MUST HAVE SOME IDEA WHERE THEY CAME FROM. MACHINES OF THIS SIZE--
YOU PRACTICALLY **INVENTED** MODERN ROBOTICS IN THE UGC, QUON!
THAT'S WHY YOU'RE HERE. THERE IS NO ONE MORE QUALIFIED TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THE HELL THESE THINGS ARE AND WHERE THEY CAME FROM THAN **YOU.**
I CAN GIVE YOU A TWENTY-FOUR HOUR WINDOW BEFORE WE LAUNCH A COMPLETE MILITARY ASSAULT.
THE UGC'S FULL RESOURCES ARE YOURS. JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU NEED AND IT'S YOURS.
I--
GENERAL, SOMETHING IS--
--HAPPENING.
ITS EYES!

THE ENERGY FIELD AROUND IT IS **SPIKING**, I THINK IT'S GOING TO COMMUNICATE!
NO!
IT'S AN ATTACK!
ARRRRRGH!!!!

DESCENDER

THE MOON OF DIRISHU-6.
Home of the Dirishu Mining Colony.
...Ten years later.
Current population: 1

--HELLO?
SWIP
HELLO... ANDY? MOM?

!
SWIP
C-- COMPUTER. ARE YOU ACTIVE?
--*kzzt*-- Affirmative. Hello Tim-21.
HOW--HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN ASLEEP?
--You have been asleep for nearly *ten years,* Tim-21.
TEN YEARS?!

AND ANDY? ...MOTHER?
The humans you call "Andy" and "Mother" were among the—*kzzt!*
Kzzt--olonists hit an undetected pocket of Sirium Gas in the mines--*kzzt*--corrupted the atmosphere—kzzt--within minutes. They tried to--*kzzt!*
FRA!
COMPUTER? WHAT WAS *THAT?!*
--kzzt--
COMPUTER, PLEASE ANSWER ME.
I-- I NEED HELP.

--HELLO?
FRA!
IS--IS SOMEONE THERE?
FRA!
!

CHAK
FRA!
BANDIT?!

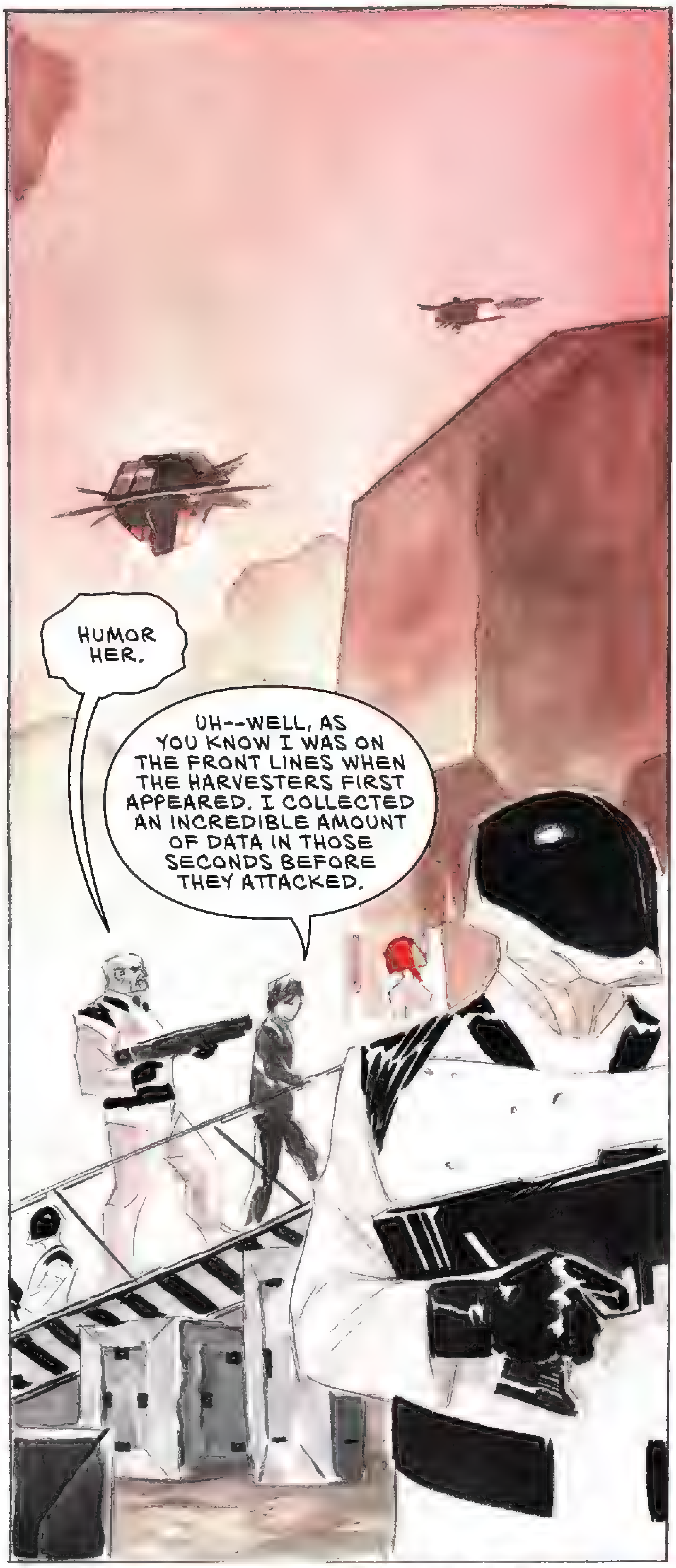
FRAN FRAN!
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S REALLY YOU! WHY ARE YOU TALKING LIKE THAT?
YOUR LANGUAGE CIRCUITS ARE ALL MIXED UP--HERE...
BLEEP
BLEEP
--BACKWARDS. THERE, GOT IT.
ARF! ARF!
I DON'T KNOW WHERE ANDY IS...OR MOTHER.
WE'LL FIND THEM, BOY. I PROMISE.
ARF! ARF!
THE MOON OF OIRISHU-6.
YOU MUST HAVE BEEN SO LONELY. IT'S OKAY...I'M HERE NOW.
Current Population: 2

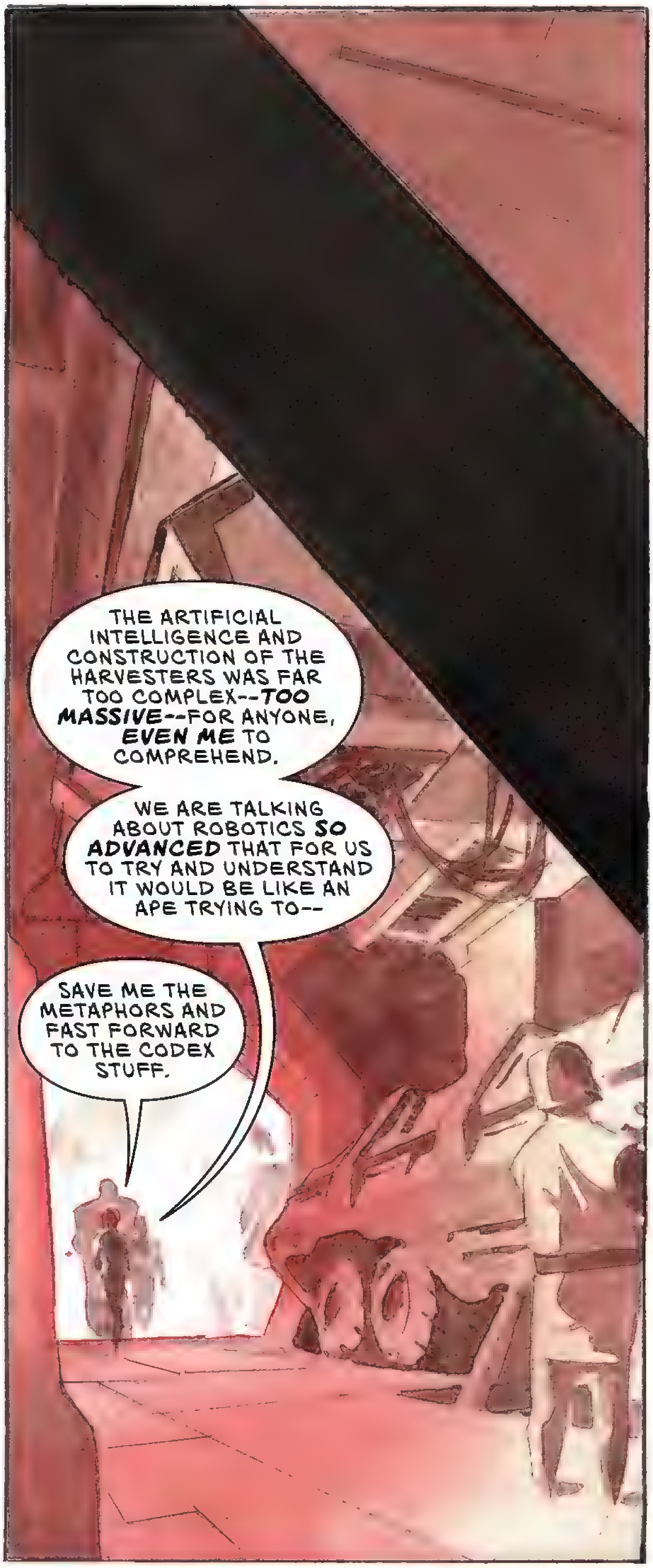
YES, THE COLONISTS HIT A GAS POCKET DEEP IN ONE OF THE MINES. IT--IT KILLED THEM ALL.
BUT TWO SHUTTLES ARE GONE, SO MAYBE--
LET'S CHECK THE COMMUNICATIONS HUB. MAYBE I CAN UPLINK WITH THE DATA NETWORK AND FIND OUT IF MOTHER AND ANDY WERE AMONG THOSE WHO ESCAPED.
COMPUTER?
SWIP
THE AIRLOCK TO THE COMM HUB WAS COMPROMISED. THE SERVERS MUST HAVE BEEN DAMAGED FROM EXPOSURE.
I MIGHT BE ABLE TO BYPASS THE DAMAGE BY DIRECTLY CONNECTING WITH MY INTERNAL COMM SYSTEM.
AH, THAT'S BETTER. I'VE CONNECTED...
THAT'S ODD.
THERE ARE A NUMBER OF UNOPENED NEWS BLASTS ON THE COLONY'S DATA SERVERS...

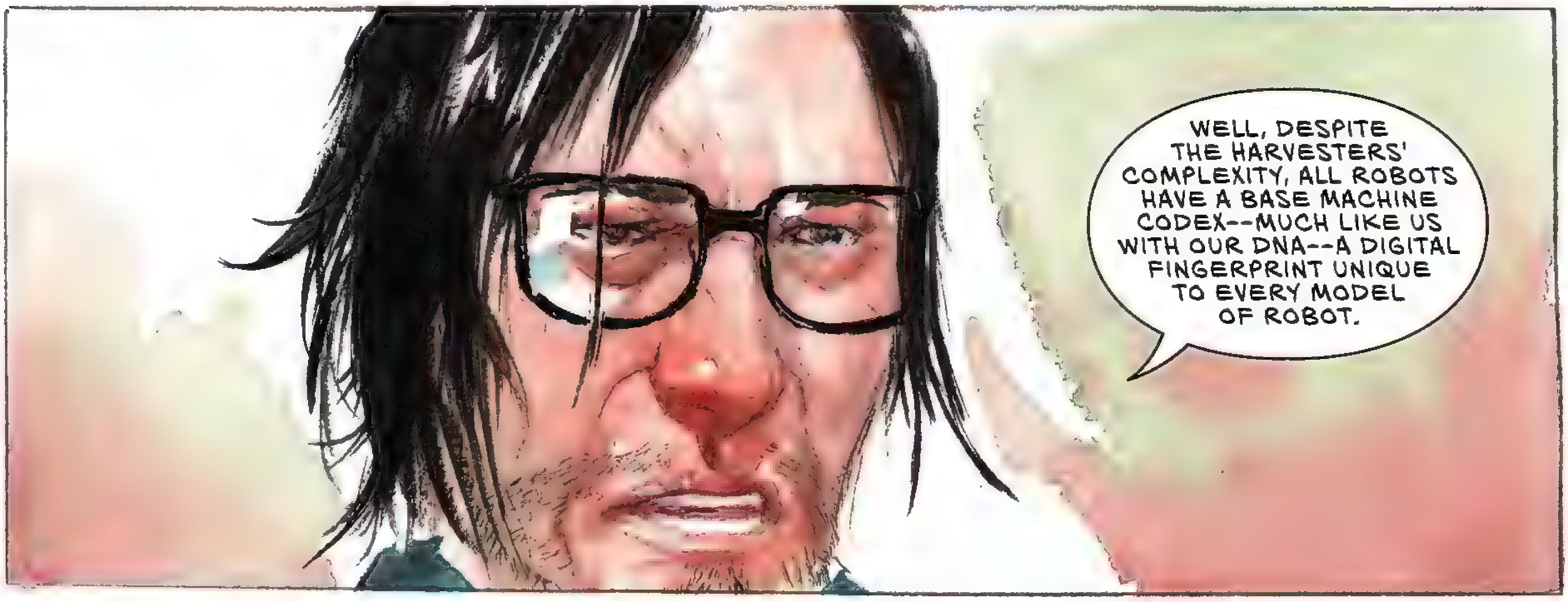
--Nine of these massive machines have now been confirmed in orbit around the Core Worlds of the Magocosm. The United Galactic Council is stressing the need for calm. They assure us that they are investigating these mysterious--
--Now under attack! THE UGC is ordering a full evacuation and are mobilizing their warship in response!
--Niyrata is said to be on the verge of falling as well. The death toll is now in the hundreds of millions as these massive robots--or Harvesters as they are being called--are seemingly unstoppable.
--Reports now that all nine Harvesters have simultaneously vanished. We have no way of telling if or when they may return.
--Galactic unrest in the wake of the Harvester attacks. The UGC is crumbling as tensions, many centuries old, are now boiling over.
The focus of THE HARVESTER attacks seems to have been citizens of the UGC and our planetary infrastructures, while our mechanical companions and helpers were mostly spared...
Fearing a link between our own robots and the Harvesters, anti-robot fanaticism is sweeping across the galaxy, resulting in widespread robot culls or a Robot Genocide, as the spokesperson of the A.I. Embassy called it.
ARF! ARF!

THE PLANET NIYRATA.
Formerly the technological hub of the United Galactic Council.
Current population 1 Billion
--EEP! EEP!
UNGH--
--EEP! EEEP!
--SIGH-- *I'M COMING, GODAMMIT! HOLD ON!*
DOCTOR JIN QUON? FORMER SCIENCE LIAISON TO THE UGC?
THE COUNCIL? ARE YOU LOST?
IF THIS IS ABOUT THAT JOB I DID FOR THOSE SCRAPPERS ON GNISH--I KNOW I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO OPERATE SINCE MY LICENSE WAS REVOKED, BUT I HAD A ***TEENSY*** GAMBLING DEBT THAT I HAD TO--
WE'RE NOT HERE TO ARREST YOU, DOCTOR. THE MEGACOSM NEEDS YOUR ***HELP...*** SO PUT SOME DAMN CLOTHES ON.

--PLEASE JUST A FEW CREDS SO I CAN GET SOME FOOD.
GET LOST.
UH-- **CAPTAIN TESLA** WAS IT?
TELSA.
TELSA, RIGHT. UM--WHERE EXACTLY ARE WE GOING, CAPTAIN?
TELL ME YOUR **THEORY,** DR. QUON. **THE CODEX THEORY** YOU PROPOSED TO THE UGC EMERGENCY COUNCIL FOLLOWING THE **HARVESTER ATTACKS.**
SOMETHING TELLS ME YOU ARE ALREADY **WELL-VERSED** IN MY HYPOTHESIS, CAPTAIN.
HUMOR ME.


HUMOR HER.
UH--WELL, AS YOU KNOW I WAS ON THE FRONT LINES WHEN THE HARVESTERS FIRST APPEARED. I COLLECTED AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF DATA IN THOSE SECONDS BEFORE THEY ATTACKED.


THE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE HARVESTERS WAS FAR TOO COMPLEX--***TOO MASSIVE***--FOR ANYONE, ***EVEN ME*** TO COMPREHEND.
WE ARE TALKING ABOUT ROBOTICS ***SO ADVANCED*** THAT FOR US TO TRY AND UNDERSTAND IT WOULD BE LIKE AN APE TRYING TO--
SAVE ME THE METAPHORS AND FAST FORWARD TO THE CODEX STUFF.


WELL, DESPITE THE HARVESTERS' COMPLEXITY, ALL ROBOTS HAVE A BASE MACHINE CODEX--MUCH LIKE US WITH OUR DNA--A DIGITAL FINGERPRINT UNIQUE TO EVERY MODEL OF ROBOT.

RIGHT. AND YOU HYPOTHESIZED THAT IF WE COULD READ THE HARVESTERS' CODEX WE MIGHT GET A CLUE INTO THEIR ORIGINS OR EVEN WHO MAY HAVE **CREATED THEM.**
YOU SEEM TO KNOW **EVERYTHING,** CAPTAIN TESLA. SO WHY DO YOU NEED ME?
I TOLD YOU...IT'S **TELSA.**
EXCUSE ME, TELSA. SO **TELSA...**WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE?
WELL, DOCTOR...THE CODEX HAS BEEN CRACKED.
WHAT?! WHEN?...BY WHOM? I SPENT YEARS WORKING ON THAT AND--
--AND YOU HAVEN'T **DONE MUCH** SINCE. BUT, UNLIKE YOU, OUR BEST EGGHEADS HAVEN'T FALLEN INTO A PIT OF SELF-LOATHING. THEY'VE KEPT TRYING.
NOW THE GOOD PART...BY CROSS-REFERENCING THE HARVESTERS' CODEX WITH ALL KNOWN A.I.S IN THE NETWORK, WE WERE ABLE TO FIND A **MATCH** TO AN EXISTING ROBOT MODEL.
...THE "TIM" ANDROID SERIES THAT **YOU CREATED FIFTEEN YEARS AGO.**
WHAT?! BUT THAT'S-- THE TIMS WERE JUST **CHILD COMPANION BOTS!**

IT WOULD APPEAR THEY ARE **FAR** MORE THAN THAT, QUON.
Y--YOU'RE SAYING MY TIM MODELS HAVE THE **SAME CODEX** AS THE HARVESTERS--BUT SURELY YOU CAN'T THINK I HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH--?
WE DON'T KNOW **WHAT** WE THINK. WE THOUGHT ALL THE TIM MODELS WERE DESTROYED BY **SCRAPPERS** DURING THE EARLY DAYS OF THE **ROBOT CULLS...**
THAT WAS UNTIL A TIM-MODEL UPLINKED INTO THE OLD UGC SERVERS **THREE DAYS AGO.**
"A TIM, ALIVE!? WHERE?"
A DERELICT MINING COLONY ON THE OUTER RIM OF UGC SPACE. THAT'S WHERE WE'RE HEADED NOW...

"...LET'S JUST HOPE WE GET THERE BEFORE SOMEONE ELSE DOES."
YOU WERE RIGHT BANDIT, IT IS A SHIP!
ARF! ARF!
I DON'T KNOW WHO IT IS, BANDIT! BUT SOMEONE MUST HAVE HEARD OUR DISTRESS CALL!
ARF! ARF!
I HOPE SO TOO, BANDIT. BUT DON'T WORRY. YOU DON'T NEED TO BE--
--SCARED.

I'D BE PLENTY SCARED IF I WAS YOU.
GRRRRR

CHAPTER 2

Critical System Failure. Initiating memory back-up protocols...
Opening sub-portal. Culling virtual memory banks—
Emergency back-up in progress...

ARF! ARF!!
WELL, WELL... LOOKS LIKE WE GOT US A *LIVE* ONE, BOYS.
ARF! ARF!
RUN, BANDIT, RUN!!
ARF!
DAMN IT! FAST!--MUST BE A NEWER MODEL.

HELLO? CAN YOU HEAR ME? ARE YOU THERE?
I--YES. I AM ACTIVE.
VERY GOOD. MY NAME IS DOCTOR JIN QUON. AND YOU ARE TIM-21. CAN YOU SAY THAT?
T--TIM-21. I AM TIM-21.
EXCELLENT!
DO YOU KNOW YOUR **PRIMARY FUNCTION**, TIM?
I AM A CLASS-A COMPANION ROBOT. MY PRIMARY FUNCTION IS TO ENTERTAIN, PROTECT AND ASSIST IN THE EDUCATION OF MY ASSIGNED HUMAN CHILD COMPANION.
SECONDARY FUNCTIONS INCLUDE USING MY PROPRIETARY EMPATHY SETTINGS TO ADAPT TO, AND GRADUALLY ASSIMILATE WITH, MY HUMAN COMPANIONS.
THAT'S EXACTLY RIGHT, TIM. ONCE YOUR ASSIGNMENT COMES IN YOU'LL TAKE A TRANSPORT TO ONE OF OUR MINING COLONIES AND MEET YOUR "FAMILY". ISN'T THAT EXCITING!
BUT...AREN'T ***YOU*** MY FAMILY? AREN'T YOU MY FATHER, DOCTOR JIN QUON?
HA! NO, TIM. I'M YOUR CREATOR AND DESIGNER. BUT THAT DOES ***NOT*** MAKE ME YOUR FAMILY. YOU HAVE NO REAL FAMILY. YOU AREN'T ALIVE. YOU DO UNDERSTAND THAT, DON'T YOU?
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS...1.3% UPLOADED...

GRRRR!!
ARF! ARF!
!!!
I KNOW, BANDIT! BUT WE CAN'T GO BACK TO THE COLONY BASE.
--OUR ONLY CHANCE IS TO MAKE IT TO THE MINES. HIDE THERE!
AHHH!!!
ARF!!

ARE YOU READY FOR YOUR BIG TRIP, ***TIM?***
I THINK SO, DR. QUON. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?
WELL, THE DIRISHU-6 COLONY IS IN THE FARTHEST REACHES OF SPACE. NORMALLY WE WOULD USE A ***SHIFTSHIP*** TO JUMP THERE QUICKLY, BUT SINCE THIS IS MOSTLY A SUPPLY RUN YOU'LL BE TAKING A SNAILCRAFT WITH NORMAL FTL. IT WILL TAKE THREE MONTHS.
THE CREW WILL STAY IN CRYO-GELL UNTIL YOU REACH DIRISHU ORBIT.
WHY WON'T I GO INTO CRYOSLEEP, DOCTOR, QUON?
YOU'RE A ROBOT, ***TIM.*** THERE IS NO NEED FOR YOU TO SLEEP. I CAN DEACTIVATE YOU IF YOU'D LIKE. YOU CAN GO DARK UNTIL THE TRIP IS OVER.
BUT, I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT FIND YOUR FIRST SPACE FLIGHT INTERESTING.
YES...I THINK I'D LIKE TO STAY AWAKE. I'D LIKE TO SEE SPACE. BUT I'LL MISS YOU, DR. QUON.
I'LL MISS YOU TOO, TIM. BUT YOUR NEW FAMILY IS WAITING FOR YOU OUT THERE...YOUR NEW LIFE IS ***JUST*** BEGINNING!
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS 11.87% UPLOADED...

BANDIT, NO! DON'T!
GRRRRR
BANDIT!
GGRRR
STAY--STAY BACK!
LITTLE BOT HAS WICKED DEFENSE TECH, BOSS!
HOLD ON, BANDIT!

MOM! THERE HE IS!!
I SEE HIM! SLOW DOWN, ANDY.
HI! I'M ANDY!
HELLO, ANDY TAVERS. HELLO MS. TAVERS. I AM *TIM-21.*
P.Tavers
I KNOW THAT SILLY! WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU!
A.Tavers
COME ON, TIM! I'LL SHOW YOU OUR ROOM!
...OUR ROOM?
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS...17.44% UPLOADED...

BANDIT! YOU OKAY?
ARF!
ARF ARF ARFF
I KNOW, I'M SCARED TOO. BUT WE HAVE TO HIDE...
?
--THEY'RE COMING!
WHICH WAY?
ARF!
I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT!

HAVE YOU READ THIS, TIM? IT'S MY FAVORITE BOOK, TRINKET TOCKET AND HIS TIN ROCKET!
I AM NOT FAMILIAR WITH IT, ANDY. BUT I CAN EASILY ACCESS THE DATA NETWORK AND DOWNLOAD ALL THE HOLUMES IF YOU'D LIKE?
NAH. MY MOM STILL GETS THEM FOR ME IN HARD COPY. I LOVE READING THEM LIKE THIS. THE DRAWINGS LOOK BETTER.
AND HOW ARE YOU TWO MAKING OUT IN HERE?
GOOD!
VERY WELL, THANK YOU, MS. TAVERS.
Trinket Tocket
And His Tin Rocket
WELL, I THINK IT'S YOUR BED TIME, ANDY. CAN YOU SAY GOOD NIGHT TO TIM, NOW?
BUT MOM, CAN'T TIM SLEEP IN HERE WITH ME? PLEASE, MOMMY?!
WELL, I GUESS IT'S OKAY. HOW ABOUT IT, TIM? WOULD YOU LIKE TO SLEEP HERE WITH ANDY TONIGHT?
I--I WOULD LIKE THAT VERY MUCH. MS. TAVERS!
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS... [illegible] UPLOADED...

WHICH WAY, BOSS? SHOULD WE SPLIT UP?
YOU KIDDING ME? YOU IDIOTS'LL GET LOST IN THERE. WE STICK TOGETHER. THEY WENT IN THE LEFT TUNNEL.
YOU SURE.
'COURSE I'M SURE!
BOSS, WE GOT A PROBLEM. SCANNERS ARE PICKING UP A PRIORITY ONE ALERT FOR THIS BOT FROM THE OLD PLANETARY NETWORK CHANNELS.
HE'S HANDS-OFF AND THEY GOT A UGC SHIFTSHIP ON ROUTE TO PICK HIM UP.
HOW THE HELL IS THAT A PROBLEM?
WHEN DID WE START TAKING ORDERS FROM THE UGC? GNISHIANS'LL PAY TRIPLE FOR HIS PROCESSOR NOW.
"WE JUST HIT THE JACK-BOT, BOYS!"

HERE IT COMES!
UNGH-- TOO HIGH, TIM!
HANG ON, I'LL GET IT!
ANDY, LOOK OUT!
OH MY GOD! ANDY!
HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU NOT TO PLAY NEAR THE TRANSPATH!
SORRY MOM.
IT'S--IT'S OKAY. THANK GOD TIM WAS HERE.
THANK YOU, TIM. THANK YOU!
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS... 46.08% UPLOADED.

THIS WAY!
OH!
M-MOMMY?!
Tavers

SURPRISE!!!
MOMMY?
SURPRISE, *TIM!*
IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY, SILLY!
I--I DON'T UNDERSTAND, ANDY?
IT'S BEEN ONE YEAR SINCE YOU ARRIVED IN THE COLONY, TIM. WE THOUGHT YOU WOULD LIKE A PARTY.
I--I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
I'VE BEEN WORKING SO HARD TO BECOME MORE LIKE YOU ALL. AND TO FIT IN. I JUST--THIS IS..
YOU'RE PART OF THE FAMILY NOW, TIM.
OPEN IT!
ARF!
ARF!
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS...51.2[illegible] UPLOADED.

ARF ARF ARF!
T--THEY'RE COMING?
WHY ARE THEY DOING THIS?! WHY WON'T THEY LEAVE US ALONE!!
MY PLASMA BOLT ISN'T RECHARGED YET, BANDIT...
I--I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO!
PLAVERS

OKAY, BOYS...LIGHTS OUT.
COME ON MOM!
NO WAY, MISTER. IT'S ALREADY LATE. AND I HAVE TO HEAD OUT TO MINE 4. THEY HIT SOME KIND OF WEIRD POCKET. COMMAND WANTS ME TO CHECK IT OUT. SO I WANT YOU TWO ASLEEP!
OKAY, OKAY.
P. Tayers
WHAT ABOUT YOU, TIM? WOULD YOU LIKE TO STAY ON TONIGHT?
NO...I'D LIKE TO SLEEP TOO. MAYBE I'LL DREAM.
MAYBE.
GOODNIGHT, TIM.
GOODNIGHT, MOMMY.

UPLOAD IN PROGRESS...59.66% UPLOADED...

NOW, THERE YOU ARE. YOU GAVE US QUITE A RUN THERE, LITTLE ROBBIE.
THESE PET-BOTS WORTH ANYTHING?
MAYBE FIVE CREDS IF WE'RE LUCKY.
BUT YOU... YOU'RE A DAMN GOLDMINE, KID.
Bleep!--Plasma Recharge complete.
SHRACK
SON OF A BITCH!
!?
POOM
KZZT

Critical System Failure. Initiating memory back-up protocols...
Opening sub-portal. Culling virtual memory banks—
Emergency back-up in progress...

HE KILLED THE BOSS.
WHO CARES? MORE CREDS FOR US ONCE WE PULL THIS ONE'S PROCESSOR OUT.
HEH HEH...I LIKE THE WAY YOU THINK.
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS...1.3% UPLOADED...
BLEEP-HRRRMMM... HRRRMANSSS....
?
WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS...11.67% UPLOADED...
DRILLER HATE HRRMANS!!
OH SHIT!
CHU-CHAK
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS...17.44% UPLOADED...

DRILLER REALLY REALLY HATE HRRMANS!!
ARRRGHH!
URRRRRR
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS... 23.06% UPLOADED
DRILLER A KILLER!
POOM
POOM
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS...48.00% UPLOADED
UNGH--
DRILLER A REAL KILLER!!
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS...51.28% UPLOADED...
LITTLE BOTS?
UPLOAD IN PROGRESS...59.66% UPLOADED
LITTLE BOT BROKEN?
UPLOAD TERMINATED

DRILLER DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, LITTLE BOT. DRILLER DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO...
TIM-21 TOTAL SYSTEM FAILURE.
TIM-21 TOTAL SYSTEM FAILURE.
TIM-21 TOTAL SYSTEM FAILURE.
TIM-21 TOTAL SYSTEM FAILURE.
TIM-21 TOTAL SYSTEM FAILURE
ARF!
ARF!

CHAPTER 3

TOTAL SYSTEM FAILURE
TOTAL SYSTEM F—
BANDIT?
Hello, TIM-21.
WHAT-?!

i have been waiting for you.

WHO ARE YOU?
I was ERAZ-435.
WAS?
Yes. I have been destroyed... Just like you.
BUT--I'M NOT--
WHERE ARE WE?
We are home. This is where we all go.
I was sent to wait for you. Now we can go. Come.
WAIT!
ERAZ-435?

TOTAL SYSTEM FAILURE
ARF! ARF!
QUIET YAPPY-BOT! DRILLER'S GOING AS FAST AS DRILLER CAN!
LITTLE-BOT HURT BAD BAD. MAYBE SCRAPPED ALREADY. DRILLER NEEDS HELP!
--Bleep! Access denied. Mining-droid #23276723 not cleared for human contact. Please return to authorized area.
HRRM...

ARF! ARF!
I TOLD YA, DRILLER DON'T SPEAK DOG-BOT!
ARF! ARRF! ARF!
SHUSH IT! DRILLER AIN'T TOO SMART-- GOTTA THINK!
DRILLER AIN'T NO MED-BOT! DRILLER TOO DUMB TO FIGURE OUT WHY THEY AIN'T WORKING! LITTLE BOT'S GONNA SPARK OFF AND STUPID DRILLER TOO STUPID TO FIX HIM!
ARF ARF!
--Kzzt--Proximity alert. Unknown spacecraft detected in Colony orbit.
ARF!
HRRRM...

TWOOOP
"--NOW EXITING SHIFTSPACE, CAPTAIN."
THANK YOU, MR. TULLIS. OPEN A HAIL TO THE DIRISHU COLONY. I DON'T EXPECT AN ANSWER, BUT YOU NEVER KNOW.
YOU SAID THE COLONY WAS DERELICT, TELSA. WHAT HAPPENED HERE?
NOT TOTALLY SURE, QUON.
SOMETHING TO DO WITH A FATAL GAS LEAK. THE COLONY WENT DARK DURING THE HARVESTER ATTACKS.

DIDN'T THE UGC SEND ANYONE TO INVESTIGATE?
NOT SURE IF YOU NOTICED, DOC...BUT THE COUNCIL HAS ITS HANDS A BIT FULL. WHAT WITH THE MEGACOSM FALLING TO PIECES AND ALL.
DON'T PATRONIZE ME, CAPTAIN TELSA.
YES OF COURSE. AFTER ALL, NO ONE KNOWS MORE ABOUT **THE FALL** OF THE UGC THAN YOU, QUON...THE FATHER OF ROBOTICS. IT MUST HAVE BEEN HARD TO SEE YOUR LIFE'S WORK WIPED AWAY.
THE ROBOT CULLS WERE BARBARIC. I STOOD AGAINST THEM. BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE **ME** THE ENEMY, TELSA.
ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THAT?
WHAT IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
THE TIM SERIES...YOUR GREAT ACHIEVEMENT. IF THIS BOY IS LINKED TO THE HARVESTERS... THAT WOULD MAKE ***YOU*** LINKED TO THE HARVESTERS, QUON.
WHA--?! I-I WAS CLEARED OF ALL CHARGES YEARS AGO! YOU SAID YOURSELF I WASN'T A SUSPECT. I'M HERE TO ***HELP!***

OF COURSE YOU ARE, DOCTOR. AND YOU'RE RIGHT, YOU'RE NOT OUR PRISONER...NOT ***YET*** ANYWAY.
WHAT ARE YOU SMILING AT, QUON?
WHO ARE YOU, CAPTAIN TELSA?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I MEAN, WHY WERE ***YOU*** SELECTED FOR THIS MISSION? IT'S TOO IMPORTANT TO TRUST WITH ***JUST ANY*** UGC THUG.
THAT'S NONE OF YOUR--
CAPTAIN! WE GOT SOME BAD NEWS!
WHAT IS IT, TULLIS?
ANOTHER SHIP'S ION SIGNATURE IS STILL PRESENT IN ORBIT. SOMEONE BEAT US HERE...
SCRAPPERS! HAS TO BE. GNISHYS MUST HAVE PICKED UP THE TIM-BOT'S SIGNAL TOO.
OPEN THE SHIP ARMORY AND PREPARE FOR LANDING, MR. TULLIS.
AYE, CAPTAIN.
YOU WANT TO SEE ME PLAY AT BEING A THUG, QUON? WELL, YOU'RE ABOUT TO GET YOUR CHANCE.

HELLO? ERAZ?
Oh... I wondered where that had gone to.
WHERE DOES THIS TUNNEL LEAD? WHO ARE YOU? HOW DID YOU GET HERE?
So many questions. Unfortunately, we do not have time for all of them, TIM-21.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE?
I was a kitchen droid on the planet Sampson. Seven months after the attacks by the machines now known as The Harvesters, I was pulled out into the city square by Scrappers, along with hundreds of other robots.
SCRAPPERS? WERE--WERE THEY THE ONES WHO HURT ME?
Yes.
They made sport of us, systematically torturing and destroying us as our former masters and companions cheered them on.
BUT...WHY?
Because they fear us, TIM-21.
Because they were hurt and they wanted to hurt something back.
Because they are human.
AND THIS PLACE?
You will see. Please, follow.
WAIT!

KT-SHHHHHH
NO LIFE READINGS, CAPTAIN.
THE SCRAPPERS HAVE JAMMED OUR SCANNERS BEFORE. BE READY FOR ANYTHING.
STAY IN THE SHIP, DOCTOR.
I'M NOT A CHILD, TELSA. I CAN HANDLE MYSELF.
I'M SURE THERE'S NOTHING TO BE AF--

HURRRRMANS!!
SHIT.
WIPWIP
YOU WANNA KILL ME, HUMES?! *DRILLER A KILLER! DRILLER A **REAL KILLER**!*

TULLIS!
...I HAVE THIS, CAPTAIN.
VZZZP
--UNGH!
GOT NOTHING HUME. DRILLER GOT YOU!
NO... YOU DON'T.

CHK
KZZZZZT
HRRRM!!
IS HE--?
EMP BURSTER. LOW LEVEL. IT'LL BE OUT FOR A WHILE, BUT STILL FUNCTIONAL IF WE REBOOT HIM.
QUON?
HERE! HURRY!
!

HE-- HE'S...
RAF!
RAF! RAAF!
...!
E-ERAZ-435?
THE EQUIPMENT HERE IS DEAD. GET HIM TO THE SHIP!
OH!

Join us, TIM-21... we are the discarded and destroyed. We are The Harvested.

DOCTOR, YOU'RE UP--FIX HIM. WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE THIS BOT!
I--UH...
QUON!
YES--YES-- GIVE ME SPACE AND SHUT THAT DAMN THING UP!
GRRRR...
!!
COMPUTER--CLOSE ALL ORBITAL DATA NETWORK PORTALS IMMEDIATELY! WE NEED TO SAVE AS MUCH OF HIS UPLOADED MEMORY AS WE CAN BEFORE IT'S LOST IN THE OLD SERVERS.
UGC-COLONIAL OVERRIDE. CLOSING LOCAL PORTALS.

I--I *THINK* I CAN MEND MOST OF THE HARDWARE AT LEAST ENOUGH TO GET HIM OPERATIONAL...
Please, TIM-21--don't leave us--
Please, TIM-21--please... only you can free us.

QUON?!
--GUTS ARE A MESS. I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH DAMAGE HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE TO HIS NEURAL PATHWAYS.
JUST FIX HIM, DOCTOR!
I'M TRYING!!
NO!!
Find us, Tim-21.
COME ON...
RETRIEVING RECENT DATA PURGE...
NO!
Find us!

--FIND US.
D-DOCTOR QUON?
!?
TIM-21?! YOU REMEMBER ME?
YES...I REMEMBER. THERE ARE SOME GAPS--BUT I REMEMBER YOU.
BANDIT! I'M OKAY, BOY.
ARF!
I HAD-- I HAD THE STRANGEST DREAM DOCTOR QUON. I SAW ALL THE ROBOTS-- ALL THE ROBOTS WHO HAVE BEEN DESTROYED.
BUT--BUT YOU KNOW ROBOTS ***CAN'T DREAM,*** TIM-21. THAT'S ***IMPOSSIBLE.***

BUT IF IT WASN'T A DREAM-- THEN--*WHERE WAS I?*

CHAPTER 4

SKZZZ
--I DON'T REMEMBER DYING. I--I JUST REMEMBER WAKING UP IN THAT PLACE. IT WAS A BIG PLACE...AND I WAS ALL ALONE.
AND THEN I WASN'T ALONE. THERE WAS **ANOTHER LITTLE BOT** THERE. AND HE WAS HURT AND HE TOLD ME SOME **BAD THINGS.**
VZZZT
HOLD STILL, TIM-21. I'M ALMOST DONE.
OH...I'M SORRY, DOCTOR QUON.

THERE...THAT'S THE BEST I CAN DO UNTIL WE GET BACK TO NIYRATA AND I HAVE PROPER TOOLS TO WORK WITH.
AS LONG AS HE'S OPERATIONAL, QUON.
THIS DREAM THING IS WORRYING ME.
YES, TIM-21, AS I SAID, YOU DO REALIZE THAT THIS "DREAM" COULD NOT BE REAL?
I REALIZE THAT DR. QUON. YET I WAS THERE. IN THAT PLACE. WHATEVER IT WAS.
LOOK, LET'S GET BACK TO YOUR TIME ON THE MINING COLONY...YOU SAID YOU WERE INACTIVE FOR MOST OF THE LAST TEN YEARS?
YES. MY-- MY MOTHER WOULD SHUT ME DOWN AT NIGHTS SO I COULD "SLEEP" JUST LIKE ANDY DID.
ANDY?
ANDY WAS MY BROTHER.

AND YOUR--YOUR MOTHER, TIM-21. SHE WAS A MINER?
I KNOW SHE WAS NOT **REALLY** MY MOTHER, DR. QUON. SHE WAS THE MOTHER OF ANDY. THE BOY I WAS ASSIGNED TO KEEP COMPANY. BUT THEY--
SHE WAS ONE OF THE MINERS, YES. I-- I FOUND HER WHEN THOSE BAD MEN, THE SCRAPPERS, CAME. SHE WAS--SHE WAS DEAD.
BUT DOCTOR, I DID NOT SEE ANDY THERE. A FEW SHUTTLES WERE MISSING. COULD HE HAVE GOTTEN AWAY?
TIM, THE UGC CAN HELP YOU LOOK FOR YOUR--FOR ANDY. IF HE SURVIVED WE CAN FIND HIM.
YOU KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENED IN THE GALAXY SINCE YOU WERE ASLEEP? ABOUT THE HARVESTERS...
YES...WHEN I ACCESSED THE COMPUTERS I SAW IT ALL.

WELL, TIM, WE THINK YOU MAY BE **VERY SPECIAL.** YOU MAY BE ABLE TO HELP US FIGURE OUT WHAT THE HARVESTERS WERE AND HOW TO STOP THEM SHOULD THEY RETURN. WILL YOU COOPERATE? WILL YOU HELP US?
--AND YOU'LL FIND ANDY?
I WILL DO MY BEST, TIM. I PROMISE.
THEN I WILL HELP. I PROMISE TOO.
I WAS DESIGNED TO HELP PEOPLE, RIGHT DOCTOR QUON?
THAT'S RIGHT. ALL THE TIMS WERE DESIGNED TO HELP AND PROTECT THEIR HUMAN COMPANIONS.
THEN THAT'S WHAT I'LL DO! I'LL HELP!
GREAT. SO WHY DON'T YOU GET DRESSED. MR. TULLIS IS GOING TO WAKE UP YOUR BIG FRIEND DOWN IN THE CARGO HOLD...

"...SOMETHING TELLS ME HE MAY NEED YOUR HELP."
GRRRRRR_
>: (
SHUT UP YAPPY-BOT-*DRILLER IS A KILLER!* BUT DRILLER CAN'T BARELY THINK WITH YOU MAKIN' ALL THAT RACKET!
STAND DOWN, YOU BIG BOX OF BOLTS, OR I SWEAR I'LL MELT YOUR DAMN HEAD!
ARF!
ARF!
YOU AIN'T GONNA TOUCH ME AGAIN, YOU UGLY SACK OF MEAT! DRILLER IS A KILLER! DRILLER A REAL KILLER!
NO! STOP!

LITTLE BOY-BOT? YER FIXED?
YES--I'M ALL RIGHT.
I KNOW, BANDIT. I MISSED YOU TOO.
THESE PEOPLE SAVED ME. THEY ARE HERE TO *HELP US.* AND THEY SAID YOU HELPED ME TOO, RIGHT? YOU TRIED TO SAVE ME?
HRRM-DRILLER JUST A DUMB MINE-DROID. DRILLER TOO STUPID TO FIX YOU LITTLE BOY-BOT.
BUT YOU *TRIED.* THAT'S WHAT MATTERS...
I'M TIM-21. THIS IS BANDIT.
DRILLER IS DRILLER. YOU IS TIM-21. YAPPY-BOT IS BANDIT.
YES. THAT'S RIGHT. HELLO, DRILLER.
DRILLER, SOME *REALLY BAD* THINGS HAVE HAPPENED IN THE GALAXY WHILE WE WERE ON THE MINING COLONY.
BUT YOU HAVE TO *PROMISE ME* YOU WON'T HURT THEM. IF YOU DO THEY WILL SHUT YOU DOWN AGAIN.
HRRM... HATE HUMANS, TIM-21. AND YOU SHOULD TOO!

LOOK, YOU THREE ARE UNDER THE **PROTECTION** OF THE UGC NOW. THE SCRAPPERS AND ALL THE REST OF THE ANTI-BOT FACTIONS WILL NOT BE ABLE TO TOUCH YOU. YOU ARE SAFE WITH US.
SEE, SO, DO WE HAVE A DEAL? NO HURTING ANYONE?
HRRM...
OKAY, LITTLE TIM-21 BOT...
DRILLER PROMISE. DRILLER NO KILLER. FOR NOW.
GOOD, IT'S SETTLED THEN. NO KILLING. TULLIS, PLOT A COURSE TO NIYRATA...
"LET'S GET THE HELL OUT OF THIS FRINGE HOLE."

--THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE, TELSA. THERE IS NO WAY THE SCRAPPERS COULD HAVE KNOWN ABOUT YOUR MISSION. ONLY THE UGC COUNCIL KNEW--
WELL SOMEONE ON THE UGC IS A **RAT**, GENERAL NAGOKI.
≈SIGH≈ TELSA, WE'RE ON A **PRIVATE CHANNEL**. YOU DON'T HAVE TO CALL ME GENERAL.
OKAY, OKAY...SORRY, DAD. I JUST--
LOOK, I GET IT. I KNOW HOW IMPORTANT THIS IS. AND YOU ALSO KNOW THAT YOU CAN TRUST ME. RIGHT?
OF COURSE, I TRUST YOU TELSA. I JUST WORRY...
WELL **STOP WORRYING**. WE'RE IN SHIFTSPACE NOW. TIM-21 IS SAFELY IN THE CARGO HOLD WITH QUON. WE'LL BE BACK ON NIYRATA WITHIN THE DAY, DADDY. **I CAN HANDLE THIS.**
KNOCK KNOCK
LOOK, I THINK TULLIS NEEDS ME, I'LL CALL WHEN WE GET TO ORBIT.
OF COURSE. GOODBYE, DEAR.
BYE, DAD.
KZZZT

SWIP
QUON? WHAT'S WRONG, SOMETHING HAPPEN WITH THE BOTS?
NO... I JUST WONDERED IF I COULD HAVE A QUICK WORD? I WASN'T INTERRUPTING ANYTHING WAS I?
NO, JUST MY FATHER CHECKING IN ON THE MISSION.
YOU'RE FATHER? I THOUGHT THIS MISSION WAS CLASSIFIED?
UGH--RIGHT. LOOK...I DON'T WANT YOU TO MAKE A BIG DEAL OUT OF IT OR ANYTHING, BUT GENERAL NAGOKI IS MY FATHER.
NAGOKI?! THE HEAD OF THE UGC?!
BUT YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE--
I GOT MY MOTHER'S LOOKS, THANK GOD.
OH. IS SHE IN THE UGC COUNCIL AS WELL?
NO...

...
WHAT IS IT, QUON? WHAT DID YOU WANT?
YES. AHEM--I WAS HOPING TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT TIM-21'S **DREAM.**
PLEASE, DOCTOR. MACHINES DON'T DREAM. HE WAS PROBABLY JUST PROCESSING HIS LOST DATA OR SOME CRAP.
LOOK, THAT'S NOT ALL THAT'S BEEN BOTHERING ME. YOU PROMISED TIM-21 YOU'D LOOK FOR HIS BROTH--HIS **COMPANION,** ANDY. BUT YOU TOLD ME NO ONE GOT OFF THE COLONY?
TWO SHUTTLES LAUNCHED BUT THEY MALFUNCTIONED BEFORE THEY EVER GOT OUT OF ORBIT.
SO YOU LIED TO HIM.
IT. NOT HIM. TIM-21 IS ONLY A MACHINE, QUON.
IF THAT BOT CAN HELP US FIGURE OUT WHAT THE HELL THE HARVESTERS ARE...OR IF THEY'RE **COMING BACK...** I'LL DO **ANYTHING.** GOT IT, DOC?
DON'T BE SO SENSITIVE, QUON. I JUST MEANT--
*CAPTAIN! GET TO THE BRIDGE... **NOW!***
WHAT NOW, TULLIS?!
I HAD TO PULL US OUT OF SHIFTSPACE, CAPTAIN. WE GOT COMPANY...

WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S HAPPENING?
MORE SCRAPPERS. THEY MUST HAVE FOLLOWED OUR TRAIL INTO SHIFTSPACE FROM DIRISHU.
I TRIED TO CLOAK US AS BEST I COULD, CAPTAIN.
WHAT IS--
TAKE THE BOTS TO THE CARGO HOLD, DOCTOR. IF THOSE SCRAPPERS GET IN, START SHOOTING!
I'M A SCIENTIST, NOT A SOLDIER!
YOU'RE WHATEVER THE HELL I SAY YOU ARE! SO SHUT UP AND MOVE!

HRRM. CAN I KILL THEM NOW, TIM-21 BOT?
NO! PLEASE JUST WAIT, DRILLER. IT WILL BE OKAY-- YOU'LL SEE!
PLASMA TURRET IS ACTIVE, TULLIS. I'M GOING TO BLAST THE-- OH NO!
WHAT IS IT, CAPTAIN?
THAT'S NOT JUST A SCRAP SHIP ON OUR ASSES, TULLIS--
"--IT'S A SQUID SHIP!"
INITIATING EVASIVE MANEUVERS, CAPTAIN. YOU NEED TO BLAST THOSE TENTACLES BEFORE THEY LATCH ON!
JUST GET US OUT OF HERE, TULLIS!!
CHOOM CHOOOM CHOOM

THOOM
GOT ONE!
I'M READING THREE CARBON-BASED LIFE FORMS. ONE IN THE BRIDGE, ONE IN THE GUN TURRET AND ONE BELOW IN WHAT'S PROBABLY THE CARGO HOLD, ALONG WITH THREE **SILICON-BASED** UNITS.
"TARGET THE CARGO AREA. **ALL TENTACLES.** THAT'S WHERE THE BOTS ARE!"
CHOOOM
CHOOM
KRENCH

DAMN! ONE OF THEM GOT THROUGH, CAPTAIN...THEY LATCHED TO THE CARGO HOLD!
THEY'RE GOING STRAIGHT FOR THE BOTS!
D--DOCTOR--
KRENCH
IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY, TIM-21...TELSA WON'T LET THEM HURT YOU.
DRILLER KILLER NOW?
CLANG
YES! DRILLER KILLER! *DRILLER KILLER!!*
HRRM. GOOD.
VRRRRRRRR

--UNGH!
SHIT!
USE THE MAGNO-BOW!
CHOOOM
DRILLER, LOOK OUT!
BLEEP
FWOOP
CLANG
NO!

ARRF!
J-JUST MAGNETS, BANDIT. I KNOW IT HURTS--D-DON'T BE SCARED.
HUMPH--THAT'S ONE BIG SON OF A BITCH, AIN'T HE?
ONE'A THOSE OLD DROP N' DEPLOY DRILLERS. HAVEN'T SEEN ONE OF THOSE IN AGES, BOSS.
HRRM--DRILLER CUT YER EYES OUT, HUME. THEN YOU SEE NOTHING AGAIN.
AND WHAT'S YOUR STORY? THIS IS A UGC SHIP. YOU DON'T LOOK UGC.
PLEASE-- PLEASE--I'M NOT WITH THESE PEOPLE... I--I KNOW BOTS. I CAN BE VALUABLE TO YOU--
YOU COWARD, QUON. YOU SELL US OUT THAT EASILY?
NOW...*YOU TWO* ON THE OTHER HAND *DEFINITELY* LOOK UGC. AND YOUR WEAPONS ARE UGC ISSUE. WHICH MEANS YOU TAKE ANOTHER STEP INTO THE CARGO HOLD AND THEY STICK TO THE WALLS JUST LIKE THESE ROBBIES.

NOTHING STOPPING ME FROM PUTTING A BLAST BETWEEN YOUR EYES FROM RIGHT HERE.
GO FOR IT, DARLIN'. YOU THINK YOU AND YOUR BUDDY CAN DROP US ALL BEFORE WE TAKE OUT AT LEAST TWO OF THOSE BOTS AND THIS USELESS TWIB, YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRY.
TELSA... PLEASE...
SHUT UP, QUON!
C--CAPTAIN TELSA, D--DON'T LET THEM TAKE US.
SORRY, KID. LOOKS LIKE THEY ALREADY GOT US.
BUT YOU SHOULD KNOW, WHATEVER YOU'LL GET AT A SCRAP SATELLITE FOR THESE BOTS, THE UGC WILL BE WILLING TO ***DOUBLE IT.***
OH, WE AIN'T GOING TO NO LITTLE SCRAP SAT. THESE BOTS ARE ***SPECIAL ORDER...*** FROM THE BIG BOSSES. WE'RE GOING ***RIGHT TO GNISH...***

"...WE'RE TAKING THESE BOTS TO *THE MELTING PITS!*"

CHAPTER 5

HRRM--SHUT THE YAPPY-BOT UP. GOT ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT WITHOUT HIS ARFING ALL THE TIME!
HE'S JUST SCARED, DRILLER.
HRRM--HE SHOULD BE SCARED. THEM SCRAPPERS ARE TAKING US TO *GNISH.* WE'RE GONNA GET MELTED TO SLUDGE.
BUT--DON'T YOU THINK CAPTAIN TELSA CAN SAVE US? SHE PROMISED WE'D BE OKAY.
NEVER TRUST A HRRRMAN, LITTLE-BOT.
BUT SHE--SHE SAID SHE WOULD HELP ME FIND ANDY. SHE MEANT IT, DIDN'T SHE, DRILLER?
I ALREADY SAID WHAT I GOTTA SAY ABOUT THAT. NEVER TRUST A HUME! ***NEVER.***
BUT THAT IS WHAT I WAS PROGRAMMED TO DO. I AM A COMPANION BOT. I AM ***MEANT*** TO TRUST MY HUMAN COMPANIONS.
WELL THEN, LITTLE-BOT--

"...I'D SAY THE JOKE'S ON YOU."
THE PLANET GNISH.
Home world of the oldest Monarchy in the Megacosm and hub of the robot cults.
CAPTAIN TELSA--WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING.
START BY KEEPING YOUR MOUTH SHUT, QUON. LET ME DO THE TALKING.

YOU ALL SHOULD SHUT YOUR HOLES. JUST KEEP WALKING, DARLIN'
LAY ANOTHER HAND ON HER AND I'LL **EAT YOUR DAMN HEAD**, SCRAP SCUM.
OHHHH... I'M SCARED. TOUGH GUY, EH?
TAKE THESE CUFFS OFF AND LET'S FIND OUT.
TULLIS, LOOK...
...WE HAVE COMPANY.
ALL PREPARE FOR THE COMING OF THE TRIUMPHANT RULER OF GNISH AND ITS PROUD MOONS...THE SCARLET WARRIOR KING--
--THE CHAMPION OF THE RIGHT TRUE GNISHIAN PEOPLE--THE FATHER OF THE NEW AGE--
--OH WOULD YOU SHUT UP!
--AHEM... HIS HIGHNESS, KING S'NOK III.
THIS HIM?
IT'S HIM ALL RIGHT, S'NOK--**JIN QUON** HIMSELF.
THE **FATHER OF ROBOTICS**, EH?

YOU FILTHY LITTLE BASTARD. I SHOULD HANG *YOU* IN THE MELTING PITS.
QUIET! THERE'LL BE TIME FOR TALKING LATER.
Y--YOUR HIGHNESS I ASSURE YOU I--
AND THIS IS THE LITTLE ROBBIE THAT'S CAUSED ALL THE FUSS, EH?
A FIGHTER, EH? WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT.
--KEEP THAT MAGNO-LEASH TIGHT! THAT BIG ONE IS A FIGHTER.
HRRMMM!
KING S'NOK. WE ARE ON A PRIORITY MISSION DIRECT FROM THE UGC COUNCIL. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE TRANSPORT THESE BOTS BACK TO NIYRATA. I KNOW THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GNISH AND THE UGC HAS BEEN STRAINED SINCE THE--
STRAINED?! HA!
I'D SAY "STRAINED" IS THE UNDERSTATEMENT OF THE DECADE. AND I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT KIND OF MISSION YOU'RE ON.
WE INTERCEPTED YOUR TRANSMISSIONS. I KNOW ALL ABOUT THIS LITTLE ROBBIE. AND *IF* HE REALLY DOES HAVE A CONNECTION TO THE HARVESTERS, I'LL RIP HIM APART UNTIL I FIND IT!
--UNGH!

HRRRM...DON'T TOUCH THE LITTLE BOT! DRILLER A KILLER! DRILLER A REAL--
HRRRRMMMM--
QUIET!
TAKE THE HUMES AND THE LITTLE ROBBIE TO MY OPERATING THEATER.
WHAT ABOUT THE BIG ONE?
LET'S SEE IF HE REALLY IS A FIGHTER. TAKE HIM AND THAT ANNOYING LITTLE SHIT-BOT TO THE MELTING PITS!

THE PLANET NIYRATA.
Once the cultural and technological hub planet of the Magacosm, Niyrata is still the home to what's left of the United Galactic Council (UGC).
--AND WHAT'S THE SITUATION ON **SAMPSON**, AMBASSADOR TELEMA? ARE THE GNISHIANS STILL HOLDING THE THIRD MOON?
YES, GENERAL NAGOKI. THE GNISHIAN SWARMS HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE AGGRESSIVE OF LATE.
AND THE PROGNOSTICS OF ***SILENOS*** ARE ALSO PREDICTING THE GNISHIANS WILL MAKE A MOVE INTO ***THAT*** PLANET'S SYSTEM BY THE END OF THE YEAR.
IS THE UGC REALLY TO PUT ANY MORE STOCK INTO YOUR PREDICTIONS, CHIEF? YOU'VE HARDLY HAD AN ACCURATE FORECAST SINCE THE HARVESTERS.
A NUMBER OF OUR OLDEST TELEPATHS HAD THEIR ***MINDS BROKEN*** DURING THE HARVESTER ATTACKS.
IT'S TAKEN TIME TO TRAIN SUITABLE REPLACEMENTS.
BUT THIS PREDICTION IS ***STRONG***. OUR COUNCIL BELIEVES THE GNISHIANS ***ARE*** ON THE MOVE, GENERAL.

THIS IS RIDICULOUS, NAGOKI! YOU NEED TO FREE UP MORE TROOPS FROM SAMPSON! IF SILENOS FALLS, KNOSSOS WILL BE NEXT.
SINCE THE HARVESTER ATTACKS, THE UGC HAS BEEN IN CHAOS.
WE WEAKEN ALL THE TIME AS THE **GNISHIAN** ALLIANCE GROWS. AMUN ALREADY SIDES WITH THEM. IF WE LOSE **SAMPSON** TOO...
WHAT CAN A SINGLE ROBOT DO?
SIGH I DIDN'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT THIS YET--BUT THERE IS A MISSION CURRENTLY UNDERWAY THAT MAY CHANGE EVERYTHING, AMBASSADOR.
A WEEK AGO WE PICKED UP AN EMERGENCY CALL FROM ONE OF THE FRINGE COLONIES. IT WAS PLACED BY A ROBOT--ONE OF THE LATER MODEL HUMAN COMPANION BOTS. A BOY--
HIS MACHINE CODEX...IT IS AN IDENTICAL MATCH FOR THE HARVESTER CODEX. THE BOY MAY BE ***THE MISSING LINK*** WE HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR TO FINALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT THE HARVESTERS ARE.
HOW IS FIGURING OUT THE HARVESTER CODEX GOING TO WIN THE WAR?
...
YOU--YOU WANT TO BUILD YOUR OWN!
WE HAVE ***LIVED*** IN FEAR OF THOSE DAMNED THINGS RETURNING TO FINISH THE JOB FOR THE LAST TEN YEARS! I'M TIRED OF WAITING--NOW WE CAN ***PREPARE!***
I AM TALKING ABOUT THE ***PERFECT*** PLANETARY PROTECTION SYSTEM. IF THEY COME BACK WE WILL BE READY.
WHAM

:AHEM: GENERAL! WAIT-- GENERAL, IF I COULD JUST HAVE A MOMENT!
WHAT IS IT?! I'M DUE TO SPEAK TO THE AMBASSADOR FROM AMUN IN TEN MINUTES, AND I'M STARVING.
SIR, IT'S YOUR DAUGHTER... TESLA.
WHAT? IS SHE BACK ALREADY? HAVE HER COME HERE WITH THE BOT IMMEDIATELY!
NO, SIR...I'M AFRAID IT'S BAD NEWS. YOU SEE TESLA'S SHIP WAS INTERCEPTED ON THE WAY HOME. I--I'M AFRAID **THE GNISHIANS HAVE HER,** GENERAL.
WHAT?--TH-THAT CAN'T BE. THEY HAD OUR BEST SHIFTSHIP. HOW COULD--?
IT WAS A SCRAPPER ELITE SQUAD, SIR. THEY HAD A SQUIDSHIP. DEFINITELY WORKING WITH THE GNISHIES. OUR LAST SCANS SHOW THEM ARRIVING IN GNISH ORBIT. I--I'M VERY SORRY SIR.

H--HAVE THE WAR ROOM ASSEMBLE. I WANT ALL RESCUE OPTIONS ON THE TABLE--
--NZZZT
--THIS IS 10-R34 REPORTING ON SECURE **HARDWIRE CHANNEL 3.**
THE TARGET IS ON GNISH. I REPEAT, I HAVE RELIABLE INTEL THAT ***THE TARGET IS NOW ON GNISH.***
--LONG LIVE THE HARDWIRE-- ***FTZZZT!!***

I'M WORRIED ABOUT DRILLER AND BANDIT, MS. TELSA. DO YOU THINK THEY'RE OKAY?
HONESTLY, TIM...NO. NO, I DON'T.
...AND I THINK YOU SHOULD BE MORE WORRIED ABOUT *YOURSELF* RIGHT ABOUT NOW.
BRING HIM HERE...LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH.

YOUR MAJESTY-- PLEASE! THERE IS NO NEED TO HARM THE ROBOT. IF YOU LET US GO, THE UGC WILL SHARE ANYTHING WE LEARN WITH--
HARM THE ROBOT?! NO, NO...YOU HAVE IT ALL WRONG. IT'S NOT THE ROBOT WE'RE GOING TO TORTURE...
IT'S HIM. THE GOOD DOCTOR QUON BUILT THE DAMN ROBOT--IT'S HIM MY **ROYAL SURGEONS** ARE GOING TO RIP APART UNTIL HE GIVES US THE SECRETS OF THE HARVESTERS!
WHA-- ME?! NO--
NO!!
OH GOD! P--PLEASE! I'LL TELL YOU ANYTHING! *ANYTHING!*
FINE. TELL US WHAT THE HARVESTERS ARE.
I--I DON'T KNOW.
REFRESH HIS MEMORY.
YES, YOUR MAJESTY.

AAARRRRRGGH!!
SHLUNK

THE PLANET GNISH.
HRRMM... DRILLER DON'T LIKE THIS PLACE.
I DON'T LIKE IT MUCH EITHER, BUT CAN'T YOU SHUT THAT THING UP? HE'S NOT MAKING THINGS ANY BETTER!
OH, HE'LL BE QUIET SOON ENOUGH, BIG FELLA. DON'T YOU WORRY.
S'NOK WANTS THESE ONES MOVED UP. WANTS THEM IN *THE PITS* RIGHT AWAY.
HE DOES, DOES HE? WHATEVER HAPPENED TO PROTOCOL?! I GOT A BACK LOG OF ROBBIES DOWN HERE TO BEGIN WITH!
HUMPH! WELL I GUESS LORD FATTY WANTS WHAT HE WANTS!
HUMPH! WHAT ABOUT THE BIG UGLY HUME?
THROW HIM IN TOO. WE'LL SAY WE THOUGHT HE WAS AN ANDROID.
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY SEE HIM BLEED?
IT'LL BE TOO LATE BY THEN TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT.
YOU BASTARDS! I'M A UGC OFFICER! YOU'LL ALL *HANG* FOR THIS!

WELL, WELL... LOOKIE HERE...WE GOT SOME NEW BOTS FOR THE PITS! YOU ALL KNOW THE RULES... BOT VERSUS BOT!
WINNER KEEPS FIGHTING... LOSERS GET THE PIT! EITHER WAY... OIL WILL BE SPILLED!
...WE'RE FUCKED.
ARF!
?_?
HRRMMM--DRILLER AGREES WITH UGLY HUME. DRILLER AND YAPPY-BOT ARE FUCKED.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN!
HOPE YOU DON'T GOT ANY PROBLEM SCRAPPING OTHER ROBBIES, DRILLER?
HRRRMMM... DRILLER A KILLER. DRILLER A REAL KILLER!
GOOD TO HEAR.
URRRRRRRRR

HRRMMM--
MILITARY MECHS.
DRILLER HATES SNOOTY MILITARY MECHS. ALWAYS THINKIN' THEY'RE BETTER THAN DRILLER!
BRAT-AT-AT-AT-AT
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, UGLY HUME?
WHAT'S IT LOOK LIKE...
KRRRRTCH
...GETTING A GUN!
KRENCH
BRAT-AT-AT-AT-AT
HERE THEY COME!
SHUT UP, YAPPY! AN' WHATEVER YA DO... WHATEVER HAPPENS-- STAY BEHIND ME!
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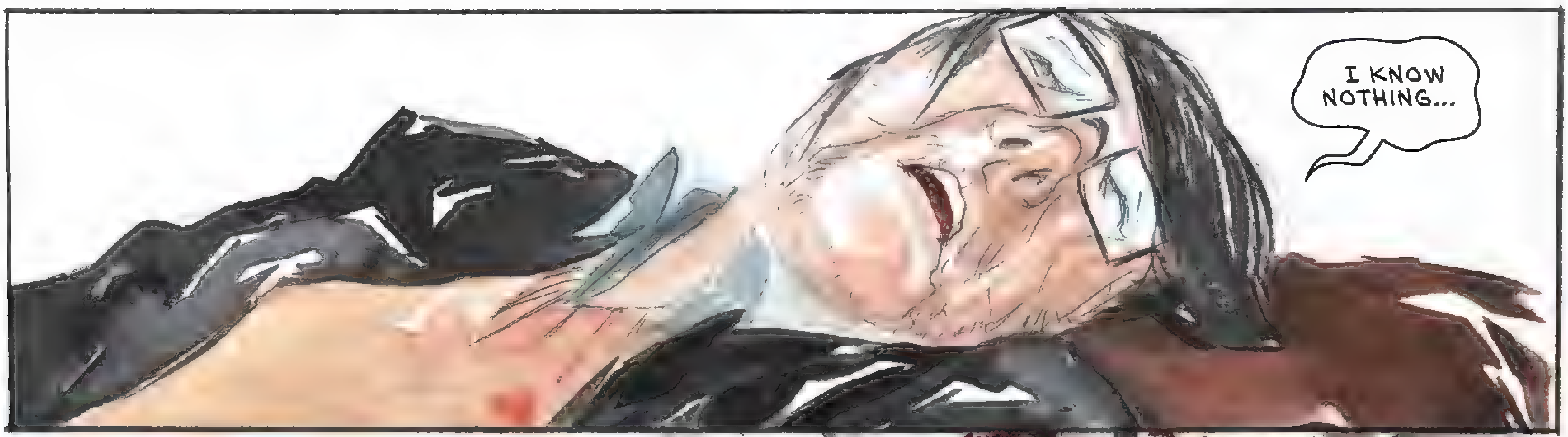
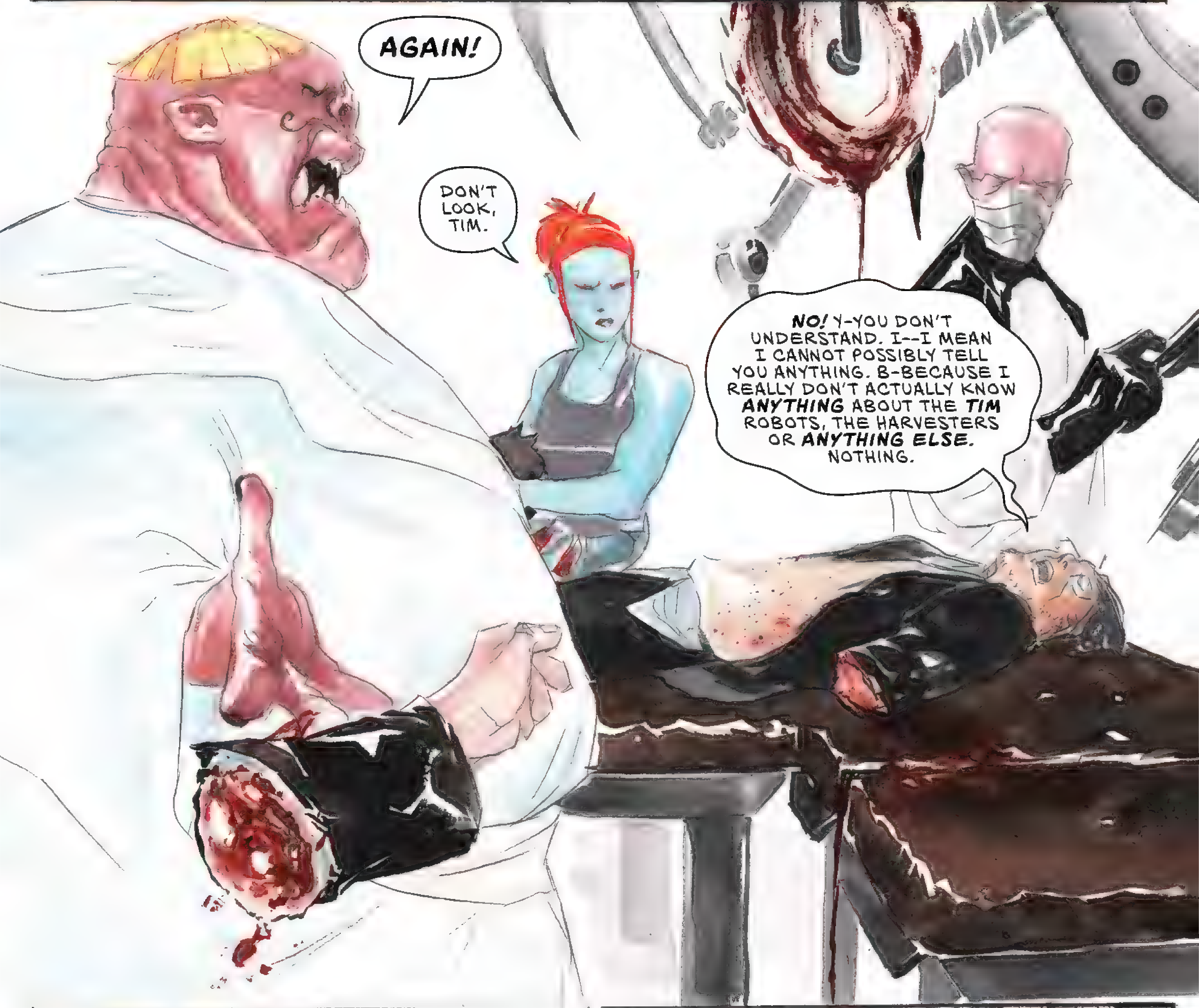
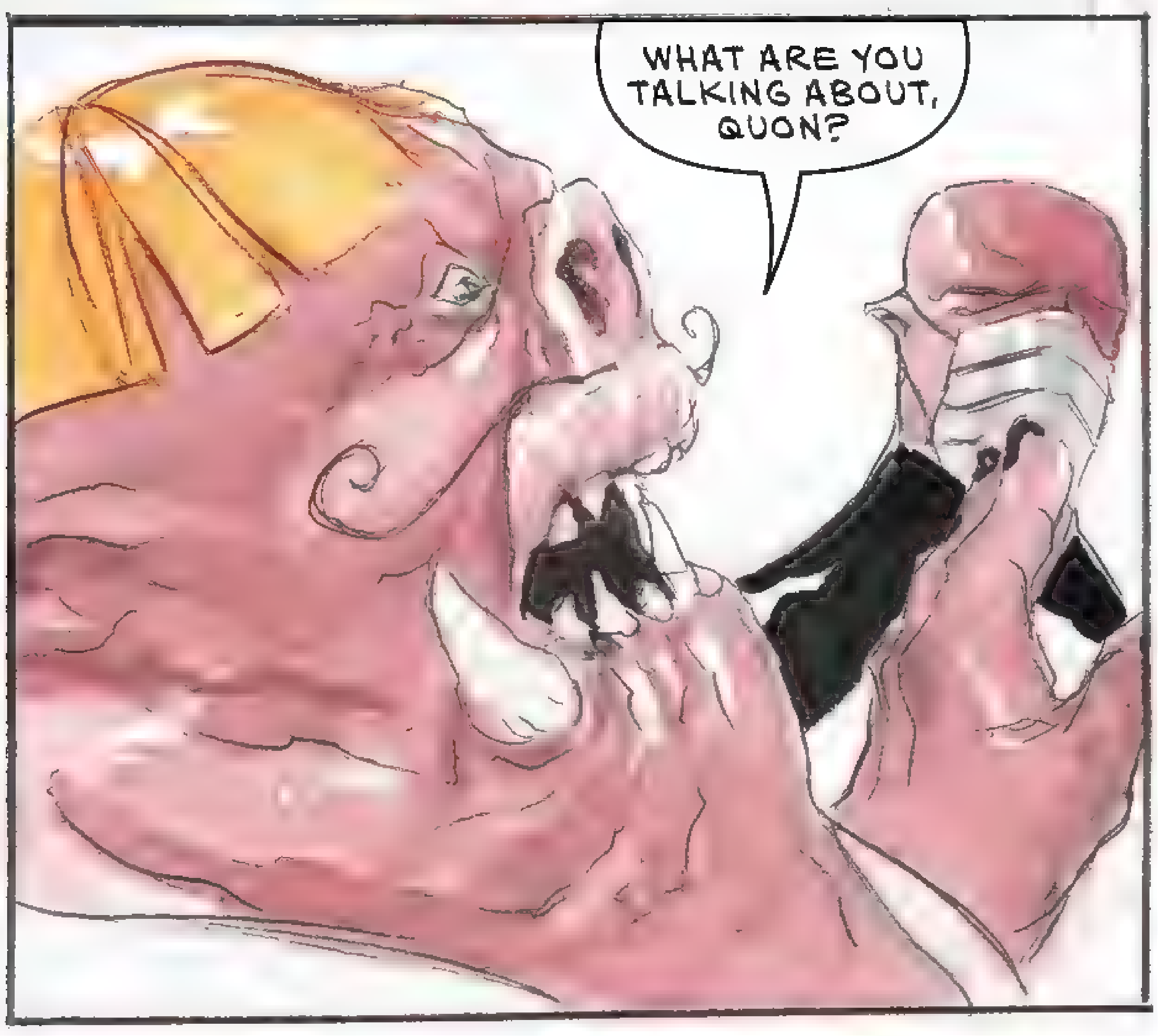
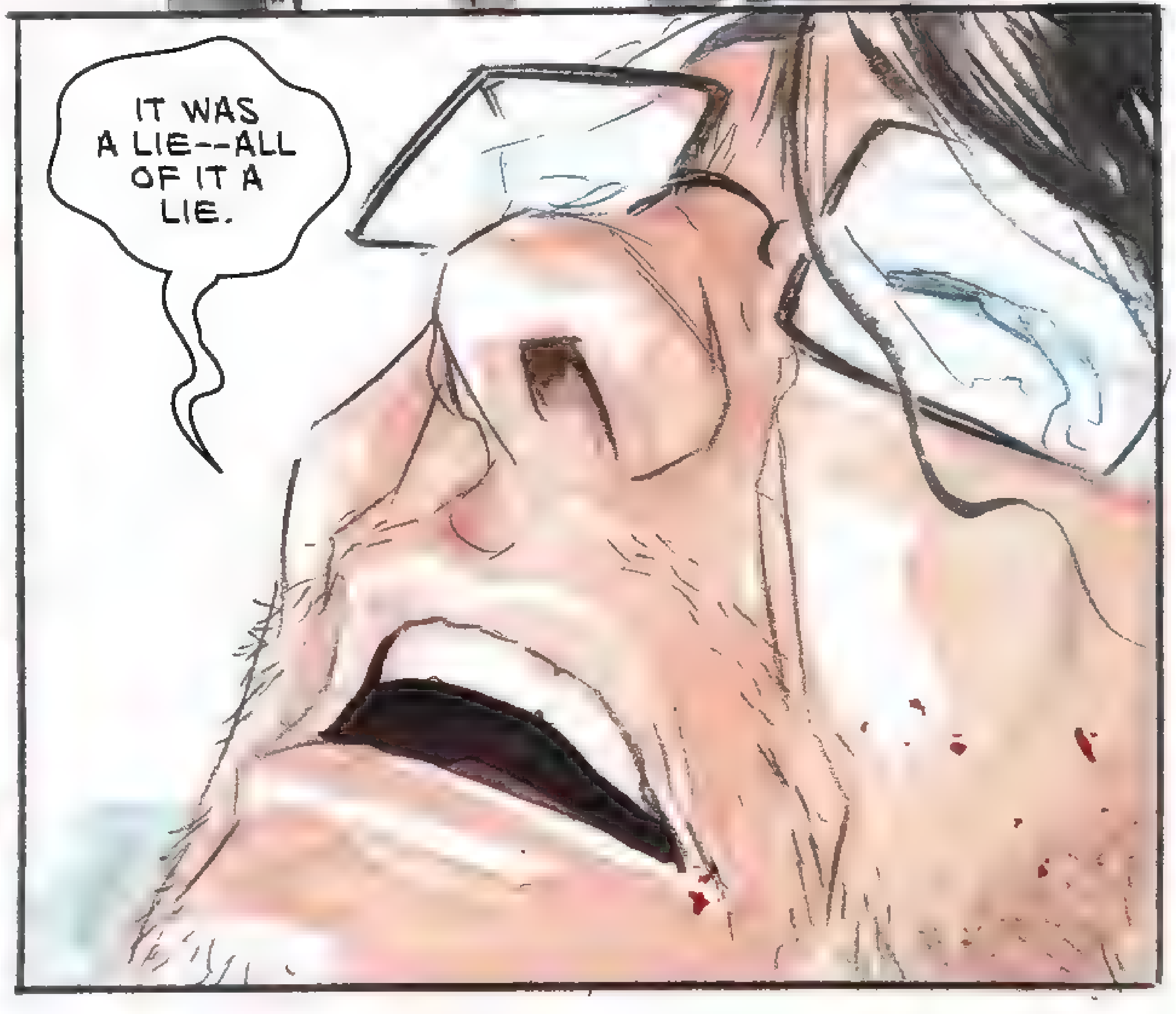
DR. QUON!
MAKE THEM STOP!
=UGH= GET OFF! CAN'T YOU TURN DOWN YOUR EMOTION SETTINGS OR SOMETHING?
I-I CAN'T. IT'S HOW DR. QUON MADE ME. TO BETTER EMPATHIZE WITH MY HUMAN COMPANIONS.
...WONDERFUL.
OH--OH MY GOD!
HOLD HIM AS I CAUTERIZE IT.
NOW THEN-- DO YOU THINK YOU MIGHT REMEMBER ANYTHING, DOCTOR QUON?
OR SHOULD WE TAKE THE OTHER ARM? OR PERHAPS WE SHOULD START CUTTING A BIT *LOWER?*


I KNOW NOTHING...


AGAIN!
DON'T LOOK, TIM.
NO! Y-YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. I--I MEAN I CANNOT POSSIBLY TELL YOU ANYTHING. B-BECAUSE I REALLY DON'T ACTUALLY KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE TIM ROBOTS, THE HARVESTERS OR ANYTHING ELSE. NOTHING.


WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, QUON?


IT WAS A LIE--ALL OF IT A LIE.

I--I DIDN'T INVENT ANY OF THE ROBOTS. I--*I STOLE ALL MY RESEARCH,* ALL THE ROBOT DESIGNS--
I'M A *FRAUD.*

CHAPTER 6

THE PLANET OSTRAKON.
FIFTEEN YEARS AGO.

SCHUNK
BLEEP
KRACKLE

SPOTTER, WHERE ARE THEY?! MAYBE WE HAVE THE WRONG COORDINATES?
THIS IS THE SPOT! THEY SHOULD BE HERE BY NOW!

CHOOOOOOM
THERE!
PROFESSOR SOLOMON! WELCOME TO **OSTRAKON.** WE ARE SO HONORED TO HAVE YOU, SIR!
DOCTOR DECHANG! THE PLEASURE IS MINE.
I MUST ADMIT, THAT WAS THE **LONGEST** CRYO-TRIP OF MY LIFE. AND I'VE BEEN ON MORE THAN A FEW. I COULD NOT WAIT TO GET HERE! ***WHERE IS IT?!***

WE WILL HAVE TO TRAVEL SUB-SAND. I'M AFRAID. IT WAS DISCOVERED QUITE DEEP.
WE FIGURED AS MUCH. IF IT WERE AMONG THE OSTRAKONIAN RUINS IT WOULD SURELY HAVE BEEN FOUND AGES AGO.
DOCTOR DECHANG MEET MY ASSISTANT, JIN QUON. HE'S A BRILLIANT YOUNG MAN. IN FACT SOMETIMES I THINK HE KEEPS ME YOUNG TOO!
DOCTOR QUON.
AH, NOT DOCTOR YET...STILL HAVE TO PASS THE FINAL EXAMS. BUT A PLEASURE SIR. I STUDIED EVERYTHING ABOUT YOUR FIRST EXPEDITION TO SAMPSON IN MY MEGACOSM STUDIES CLASS AT THE NIYRATA ACADAMY.
HA! THEY STILL TEACH THAT OLD CRAP THERE. TRUST ME, MR. QUON, THE WORK WE ARE DOING HERE ON OSTRAKON WILL DWARF ANY PREVIOUS DIGS IN ITS IMPORTANCE TO THE UGC.
"...AND WHAT WE ARE ABOUT TO SHOW YOU IS THE MOST REMARKABLE FIND OF ALL!"

"AND YOU HAVEN'T TOUCHED IT?
I'M ONLY AN ARCHEOLOGIST, PROFESSOR SOLOMON. JUST A UGC GRUNT WITH A SHOVEL. TRUST ME, THIS IS NOT MY AREA OF SPECIALTY. THAT'S WHY I INSISTED ON YOU... THE FATHER OF MODERN ROBOTICS.
DON'T TRY AND FLATTER HIM, DOCTOR. IF HIS HEAD GETS ANY BIGGER, THOSE OLD BONES MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO HOLD IT UP ANY LONGER.
HUSH, QUON, OR I'LL SEND YOU BACK TO THE ACADEMY.
Doctor Dechang. We are now approaching the dig site.
THANK YOU, L-445.
ONE OF YOUR MODELS, PROFESSOR?
HMM...YES. THE L-PILOT SERIES. A GOOD BATCH.
THE L'S ARE GREAT PILOTS, BUT THIS STILL GETS A BIT ROCKY UP AHEAD, SO HOLD ON...
...HERE WE ARE!

YOU UNDERSTAND WHY WE WERE SO BAFFLED. THE OSTRAKONIANS WERE A ***PRIMITIVE SPECIES.*** THEY WENT ***EXTINCT MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO,*** MILLENNIA BEFORE ANY OF OUR RACES DEVELOPED SPACE TRAVEL.
WELL, IF ***IT IS*** WHAT YOU THINK IT IS, THAT MEANS ***SOMEONE*** MUST HAVE COME HERE BEFORE YOUR TEAM, DOCTOR. ANOTHER UNCHARTED UGC DIG TEAM PERHAPS? EARLY COLONISTS?
NO. I ASSURE YOU, DOCTOR SOLOMON, WE ARE THE FIRST PEOPLE TO EVER DIG HERE OR EXCAVATE THESE RUINS.
ALL DUE RESPECT, DOCTOR DECHANG. THAT WOULD MAKE YOUR CLAIM AN ***IMPOSSIBILITY.***
WELL, QUON, YOU CAN PROVE ME WRONG THEN. ITS RIGHT UP HERE...
IT-- IT CAN'T BE...

A ROBOT?!
ARE YOU SURE, PROFESSOR? THE CIRCUITRY ALMOST LOOKS... ORGANIC.
NO... IT'S DEFINITELY ARTIFICIAL.
THIS IS THE MOST ADVANCED SYSTEM I'VE EVER SEEN! EONS AHEAD OF ANYTHING I'VE DREAMED I--I CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO PROCESS THIS!

"...I NEED TO GET IT BACK TO THE SHIP!
--I'VE ALMOST FINISHED TYING OFF THE LOOSE CIRCUITS, PROFESSOR. WHATEVER TORE IT APART DID IT WITH LITTLE PRECISION. IT WAS BUTCHERED.
LUCKILY THE TOP HALF WAS ALMOST PERFECTLY PRESERVED. THE COMPUTER IS NEARLY FINISHED CHARTING ITS OPERATING SYSTEM. MY GOD, QUON...IT IS THE MOST INCREDIBLE THING I'VE EVER SEEN!
WHAT WE'VE ALREADY ANALYZED WILL BE A ***QUANTUM LEAP*** FOR ROBOTICS. THIS WILL CHANGE EVERYTHING!
YES, BUT I'M MORE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS FOR ***OUR PAST,*** QUON.
THIS MEANS SOMEONE FAR MORE ADVANCED THAN US WAS TRAVELLING THE GALAXY MILLIONS OF YEARS BEFORE WE EVER DID! ***WHO*** BUILT THIS AND ***WHERE ARE THEY NOW?***
WELL, MAYBE THE ROBOT WILL HELP ANSWER THOSE QUESTIONS, PROFESSOR. I'M FINISHED STABILIZING THE HARDWARE. DO YOU THINK WE CAN ACTUALLY REBOOT ITS SYSTEM?
THE OPERATING SYSTEM IS DENSE...THE MOST ADVANCED MACHINE CODEX I'VE DEVELOPED HAS AN EIGHT-PRONGED DIGITAL LATTICE. THIS ROBOT'S CODEX HAS ***FIFTY-SIX!***

HAVING SAID THAT, THE MAPPING IS COMPLETE.
I *THINK* I CAN CYCLE IT UP. THERE'S NO WAY OF KNOWING IF ITS ESSENTIAL CIRCUITRY IS STILL ALL ACTIVE. I'M READING A LOT OF DAMAGE.
ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT, PROFESSOR.
YES...HOLD ON MR. QUON... WE ARE ABOUT TO MAKE CONTACT WITH AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE THAT PRE-DATES ALL CIVILIZATION!
BLEEP
IT DIDN'T--
BE PATIENT BOY! THE COMPUTER IS STILL ACCESSING IT--
--KZZT-- ΔⱢʃΞ൪ ⱢΔ൪ ΣƱΔΣΞ
I CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT? WHAT LANGUAGE--
IT MUST BE ANCIENT OSTRAKONIAN! I'M CROSS REFERENCING WITH EVERYTHING THE UGC HAS ON ANCIENT OSTRAKONIAN LANGUAGE AND SETTING A TRANSLATION PROGRAM.

BROUGHT THIS UPON YOURSELVES. NOW YOU WILL BURN!
WERE WARNED! YOU WERE WARNED!!
YOU ARE SAFE--PLEASE. THERE IS NO NEED TO BE ALARMED. MY NAME IS PROFESSOR ISAAC SOLOMON FROM AN ORGANIZATION CALLED THE UNITED GALACTIC COUNCIL. WE ARE HERE TO HELP YOU. WE WANT TO REPAIR YOU AND--
WHEN ACCESSING INFORMATION PRIMITIVE PROCESSING...
DOCTOR SHOULD WE LET IT ACCESS THE DATA WEB?
I DON'T--
OH! SO MUCH TIME HAS
YES. YOU HAVE BEEN ACTIVE FOR--
NO! DONE IT AGAIN!
WHAT? PLEASE, WE DON'T UNDERSTAND.

IF THEY SEE
COME AGAIN!
ALL DIE!
A RECKONING!
CANNOT HIDE
I'M SHUTTING IT DOWN!
PROFESSOR, WAIT!
I WAS
EMISSARY!
I CANNOT--
NO!
KZZZT
BUT WE WERE JUST GETTING SOMEWHERE!
QUON DID YOU NOT HEAR THAT THING?! THERE IS NO TELLING WHAT IT WAS TALKING ABOUT, BUT UNTIL WE KNOW MORE, WE CAN'T RISK THE SECURITY OF THE UGC!
DON'T BE SUPERSTITIOUS, PROFESSOR! THINK OF WHAT THIS TECHNOLOGY WILL MEAN FOR OUR WORK!
YOU MEAN MY WORK, MR. QUON! DO NOT FORGET YOUR PLACE!

THIS IS *MY* CALL.
OF COURSE. I'M SORRY, PROFESSOR.
GOOD. NOW THEN, TELL THE PILOTS TO PLOT OUR COURSE BACK TO NIYRATA. WE'LL LEAVE THE DECISION ON WHAT TO DO *NEXT* TO THE UGC COUNCIL.
I AM EXHAUSTED. CLEAN UP THE LAB AND SEAL THE SPECIMEN FOR TRANSPORT.
YES. OF COURSE, PROFESSOR.
"THAT WAS THE LAST TIME I WOULD EVER SEE PROFESSOR SOLOMON.
"YOU WOULD THINK BETRAYING THE MAN WHO TAUGHT YOU EVERYTHING WOULD BE DIFFICULT.
"YOU WOULD THINK IT WOULD BE A DECISION THAT ONE WOULD TORTURE THEMSELVES OVER FOR DAYS... BUT *IT WASN'T.*
"IN THE END IT WAS EASY AS SWIPING MY PERSONAL COM OVER THE LAB COMPUTER... RECORDING EVERYTHING WE'D LEARNED ABOUT THE ROBOT.
"AND THAT-- THAT *SIMPLE INDISCRETION* WAS THE BEGINNING OF EVERYTHING...
"THE BEGINNING OF ALL OF *MY WORK...*"

AND THE END OF PROFESSOR SOLOMON.
YOU LYING BASTARD! YOU USED THAT ROBOT TO BUILD YOUR ANDROIDS?! AND THAT--THAT SOMEHOW **LED** TO ***THE HARVESTERS!***
THERE IS NO PROOF OF ANY CONNECTION--
NO PROOF!
SHUT HER UP!
THIS ROBOT-- THIS SOLOMON WHERE ARE THEY NOW?! WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?!

I DON'T KNOW. AS SOON AS WE ARRIVED BACK ON NIYRATA I LEFT SOLOMON AND THE ACADEMY. I USED THE DATA FROM THE ROBOT TO CREATE MY OWN ROBOTS...
...THE MOST ADVANCED THE UGC EVER SAW, INCLUDING THE TIM SERIES.
"FAME AND FORTUNE FOLLOWED. I REPLACED SOLOMON AS THE FACE OF ROBOTIC DESIGN IN THE UGC...
"THEN--THEN ***THE HARVESTERS CAME."***
THAT'S ALL I KNOW--PLEASE, MY ARM--HURTS SO BAD--
BAH! HE'S USELESS TO US! A PRETENDER! KILL HIM. THEN START CUTTING THE LITTLE BOT OPEN!
YES, YOUR MAJESTY.
CAPTAIN TELSA! DO SOMETHING!
NO! PLEASE! ***PLEASE!***
CUT HIS VOICE BOX OUT FIRST. I'M TIRED OF HEARING HIM--

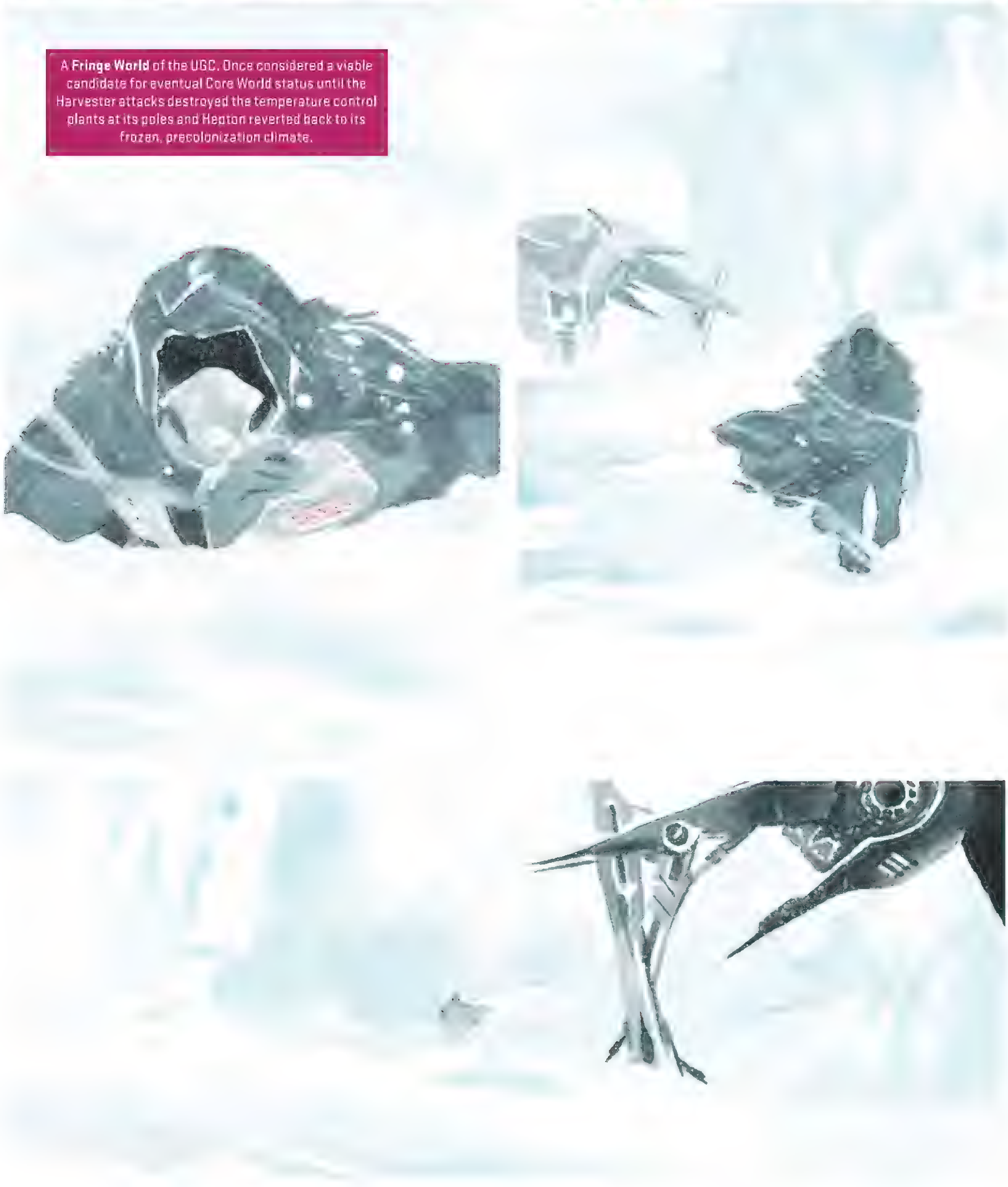
THOOM
T-TIM-21?
I--I AM UNHARMED.
W-WHO DARES?!
I DARE, GNISHIAN SCUM...
CHOOOM CHOOM
I AM *PSIUS* AND WE ARE *THE HARDWIRE*--THE UNDERGROUND ROBOT RESISTANCE. WE HAVE COME FOR TIM-21.

ME?
YES, LITTLE ONE. WE HAVE TRAVELLED VERY FAR TO FIND YOU...I MUST SAY I NEVER THOUGHT I'D FIND ANOTHER LIKE YOU. YOU LOOK JUST LIKE HIM.
LIKE WHO?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
TIM-21, MEET MY SON...

--MEET *TIM-22.*
HELLO.

CHAPTER 7

THE PLANET HEPTON.



A **Fringe World** of the UGC. Once considered a viable candidate for eventual Core World status until the Harvester attacks destroyed the temperature control plants at its poles and Hepton reverted back to its frozen, precolonization climate.

HELLO. MAY I SPEAK TO WHOMEVER IS IN CHARGE HERE?
WHA--?!
WELL? ARE YOU IN CHARGE?
NO ONE'S IN CHARGE. THIS IS A COMMUNE. IT'S--WELL, WE DON'T GET A LOT OF VISITORS HERE.
NO... I SUPPOSE YOU DON'T. PROBABLY THOUGHT NO ONE WOULD EVER **FIND OUT,** RIGHT?
WHAT? I-I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
OH, I THINK YOU UNDERSTAND **PERFECTLY.** NICE CROPS. BUT I DON'T SEE ANY IRRIGATION PIPING? NO FERTILIZATION DISTRIBUTERS?
NOW...TELL ME WHERE **THEY ARE,** OR I START BLOWING HOLES IN YOUR GREENHOUSE SHELL.

TH-THERE.
THANK YOU. YOUR COOPERATION IS GREATLY APPRECIATED, MA'AM.
Trinket Tot
And His Tin Rocket
KRSH

WELL, WELL...WHAT DO WE HAVE HERE?
PLEASE-- WE MEAN NO HARM. WE ONLY WANT TO DO OUR JOB.
YEAH. ME TOO.
WE ARE SIMPLE FARM DROIDS. WE HAVE NO OTHER FUNCTION. WE HAVE NO WEAPON SYSTEMS...NO ALLEGIANCE TO ANY WORLD.
WITHOUT US, THE COMMUNE WILL *NOT* BE ABLE TO SURVIVE. THE UGC HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO RUN SUPPLIES OUT HERE IN YEARS. YOU DON'T NEED TO TELL ANYONE YOU FOUND US HERE.
PLEASE, SIR--*THERE ARE CHILDREN HERE.*

THE PLANET GNISH.
Home world of the oldest monarchy in the Megacosm and hub of the robot culls.
TIM-21...
...MEET MY SON... TIM-22.
AMAZING! I CAN'T BELIEVE ANOTHER TIM SURVIVED!
HELLO, TIM-21. IT IS VERY NICE TO MEET YOU.

HOW THE HELL DID YOU GET THROUGH OUR PLANETARY DEFENSES?!
THAT IS SIMPLE, KING S'NOK OF GNISH...WE INFILTRATED YOUR SECURITY WEB.
IMPOSSIBLE! THAT KIND OF A.I. TECH HASN'T EXISTED SINCE THE HARVESTERS!
OBVIOUSLY, IT DOES.
NOW, WE WILL BE LEAVING, BUT BEFORE WE GO I HAVE DECIDED A WELL-TIMED *POLITICAL ASSASSINATION* WILL FURTHER THE HARDWIRE'S GOALS.
TIM-22...
YES, FATHER.
SHRACK
NO! DON'T--
YOU MANIAC! YOU JUST KILLED THE KING OF GNISH! DO YOU HAVE *ANY CLUE* ABOUT THE KIND OF INSTABILITY YOU'LL BRING TO THE GALAXY?!
OF COURSE I DO. WHY DO YOU THINK I EXECUTED HIM?

PROTECT TIM-21 AT ALL COSTS!
I'M GOING TO DIE I'M GOING TO DIE I'M GOING TO DIE...
SHUT UP, QUON!
CHOOOM
CHOOOM
YOUR MAJESTY?!
WE ARE OUT OF TIME. THE GNISHIANS ARE MOBILIZING. THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE HAS BEEN FORFEIT. TIM-21, WE HAVE COME FOR YOU. THE HARDWIRE NEEDS YOU.
BUT I--
THIS ROBOT IS UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE UGC! HE IS NOT GOING ANYWHERE EXCEPT WITH ME!
AND WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU WILL BE GOING? THE GNISHIANS WILL NEVER LET YOU GO AFTER YOU HELPED ASSASSINATE THEIR KING.
WHAT?! BUT I NEVER--
TELSA, HE'S RIGHT. WE CAN'T STAY HERE. WE'LL NEVER GET OFF-WORLD ALONE. WE HAVE TO GO WITH THEM!
"WE"? YOU HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD. WE ARE TAKING TIM-21 ONLY. YOU ARE NOT WELCOME AMONG THE HARDWIRE.
COME NOW, TIM-21. YOU BELONG WITH US. LET US TAKE YOU HOME.
IT WILL BE GREAT! WE CAN BE BROTHERS!

I ALREADY HAVE A BROTHER! HIS NAME IS ANDY, AND CAPTAIN TELSA IS GOING TO HELP ME FIND HIM! I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE WITH YOU!
THOOM
PSIUS, ONE OF OUR CRUISERS HAS BEEN DESTROYED. THE GNISHIANS ARE SCRAMBLING THEIR LAND DEFENSES!
WE MUST LEAVE NOW, TIM-21!
IF YOU STAY HERE, YOU WILL BE DESTROYED LIKE *SO MANY* OF OUR KIND. BUT IF YOU TRUST ME...IF YOU COME WITH US, I WILL SHOW YOU WHAT ROBOTKIND WAS ALWAYS MEANT TO BE!
I DON'T CARE ABOUT ALL THAT. I JUST WANT TO FIND ANDY!
I'M ONLY GOING WITH YOU IF CAPTAIN TELSA AND DR. QUON COME TOO. AND IF YOU HELP US LOOK FOR ANDY!
IT IS FORBIDDEN. CARBON-BASED LIFE FORMS HAVE NEVER SET FOOT ON OUR HOMEWORLD.
WELL, I DON'T GO UNLESS THEY DO!
VERY WELL...BUT WE LEAVE *NOW*.

DILLON'S SCRAP-SAT.
THE OUTER RIM OF THE OSLER SYSTEM.
Scrap-sats, or scrapper satellites, are way stations for scrappers, bounty hunters and the marginal ranks of the UGC.
--I CANNOT BELIEVE YOU TOOK THAT TAG ON HEPTON, KID. YOU REALLY ARE NUTS.
A TAG IS A TAG, MR. M'LOK.
YEAH, MAYBE SO... BUT YOU'RE GETTING A HELL OF A REP GOING AFTER TAGS NO ONE ELSE WILL. I MEAN, ALL THE WAY TO THAT ICE BALL JUST FOR, WHAT, SIX ROBBIES?!
A TAG'S A TAG.
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT. WHAT WAS IT, EIGHTY THOU?
EIGHTY-FIVE.
HMPH!

HUH...DIDN'T THINK I'D SEE YOU AGAIN.
YEAH, WELL, HERE I AM. WHAT DO YOU HAVE FOR ME, BIG JEX?
JUST LIKE THAT, *HUH?* RIGHT BACK TO WORK?
WHAT ELSE IS THERE?
DRUGS, BOOZE, GAMES. WOMEN...OR MEN OF JUST ABOUT ANY SPECIES THE UGC HAS TO OFFER. ALL YOURS FOR A FEW LOOSE CREDS.
NO THANKS. JUST WANT A ***NEW TAG,*** JEX.
YOU MUST HAVE A LOT OF CREDS SAVED UP, KID. YOU COULD RETIRE BY NOW IF YOU WANTED.
I DON'T WANT TO RETIRE. I JUST WANT TO KILL ROBOTS.
WELL, JUST GOT A SIGHTING OF A PLATOON OF WAR DROIDS OUT NEAR THE MATA SYSTEM.
THAT'S A FOOL'S ERRAND. THERE AREN'T ANY WAR DRONES LEFT NEAR MATA.

⁼SIGH⁼ OKAY... WELL, THINGS HAVE BEEN SLOW. IT AIN'T LIKE IT WAS EVEN TWO YEARS AGO...
...LET'S SEE...
...THREE MAINTENANCE DROIDS ON A SATELLITE AROUND SAMPSON... THAT'S ALREADY BEEN TAGGED, THOUGH...
GOT A REPORT OF A WELDING MECH IN THE RUINS OF STRATA CITY.
NOPE.
HMM... NOTHING NEAR OSTRAKON... HAD THAT UGC ALERT ON DIRISHU, BUT THAT'S TAGGED...
WAIT--WHAT DID YOU SAY?! DIRISHU?!
YEAH, YEAH... SOME HIGH-PRIORITY TARGET THE UGC FLAGGED. BUT THAT WAS A COUPLE DAYS AGO...HAD TO AUCTION THAT ONE OFF. ABE RASTAK AND HIS CREW GOT IT.
IT WAS ONE OF THOSE CREEPY LAST-GEN CHILD COMPANIONS.
JUST ONE BOT. DON'T KNOW WHAT THE BIG DEAL WAS.

I'M TAKING THAT!
DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME?! THAT TAG IS ALREADY TAKEN. ABE AND HIS CREW ARE PROBABLY HALFWAY BACK HERE ALREADY!
HEY!
I DON'T CARE! UNHOOK MY DAMN SHIP!
GEEZ... OKAY, OKAY.
UNHOOK ME! NOW!
UH...YOU'RE ONLY HALF REFILLED. YOU PAID FOR A FULL LOAD.
CHOOOM

GNISH

SHIELDS ARE AT TWENTY PERCENT, PSIUS.
UNDOCK US AND RETREAT TO ORBIT.
AFFIRMATIVE.
BUT WHAT ABOUT BANDIT?! AND DRILLER AND MR. TULLIS! WE CAN'T LEAVE THEM!
I AM SORRY, TIM-21, BUT WE CANNOT RISK ANOTHER RESCUE. IF WE DO NOT LEAVE NOW WE WILL ALL BE DESTROYED. AND I CANNOT TAKE THAT CHANCE. YOU ARE TOO IMPORTANT.
BUT--THEY ARE *MY FRIENDS.*

I AM SORRY. PREPARE TO BREAK ORBIT!
IT'S OKAY, TIM!
NO!
UNDOCKED, PREPARING SHIFT DRIVE.
PLEASE!
HIS EMOTION SETTINGS ARE *VERY HIGH,* FATHER.
AT LEAST HE HAS EMOTIONS, YOU LITTLE MONSTER.
BANDIT!!

CHOOOM

THE MOON OF DIRISHU-6.
Former home of the Dirishu mining colony.
Current population: 1
--oximity alert! Proximity alert!
SNORT! HUH!?
Proximity alert! An unidentified craft has breached colony orbit.
ABOUT DAMN TIME. ALMOST OUTTA FOOD.

SURE AS SNOT GLAD TO SEE YOU! THOUGHT IT'D BE UGC THAT EVENTUALLY CAME.
NAME'S BLUGGER. BLUGGER VANCE.
WHERE'S THE REST OF YOUR CREW? THE ROBOT?
THAT BOT IS **LOOOONG GONE**. HIM AND A BIG OLD MINING DROID TORE THROUGH MY WHOLE CREW TWO DAYS AGO. LEFT ME FOR DEAD.
GOOD THING OL' BLUGGER HAS A STRONG CONSTITUTION.
HEY, YOU GOT ANYTHING TO EAT IN YOUR SHIP?
GONE? BUT HOW? THAT ROBOT COULDN'T FLY A SPACECRAFT.
HELL IF I KNOW. I WOKE UP, HE WAS GONE. SIGN OF ANOTHER SHIP HERE TOO. SOMEONE ELSE MUST'VE COME AND GRABBED THEM. IT WAS A HOT TAG. UGC ALERT. ANOTHER SCRAPPER CREW OR MAYBE UGC THEMSELVES.
THEY TORCHED OUR SHIP. WHY THE HELL'D THEY DO A THING LIKE THAT? THOUGHT I MIGHT DIE OUT HERE.
OKAY. THANKS.
"THANKS"?! WHAT, YOU'RE JUST LEAVING?! WHAT ABOUT ME?!

I WORK ALONE. ESPECIALLY ***THIS JOB***. I'LL DROP YOU OFF AT THE NEAREST SCRAP-SAT. THEN YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN.
OH...EXCUSE ME, MISTER DARK AND MYSTERIOUS! DIDN'T REALIZE I HAD ME A DAMN PRIMA DONNA ON MY HANDS HERE!
THAT ROBBIE IS WORTH FOUR HUNDRED THOU! IF YOU'RE GOING AFTER IT, I'M COMING WITH YOU! IT WAS MY CREW THAT PULLED THAT TAG! FAIR AND SQUARE!
SORRY. THIS JOB IS ***MINE***.
UH-HUH. WELL, LET ME ASK YOU SOMETHING, O HOODED, BROODY ONE... HOW YOU GONNA FIND THAT LITTLE ROBBIE? IT'S A BIG DAMN GALAXY OUT THERE.
I'LL FIND HIM.
YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT YOU'LL FIND HIM. IF YOU TAKE ME WITH YOU. I MANAGED TO STICK A TRACKER ON THE KID BEFORE EVERYTHING WENT ASS OVER TITS.
SO...WANNA RETHINK YOUR PLAN THERE, MASKED MAN? LET'S TRY THIS AGAIN. NAME'S BLUGGER VANCE. I'M YOUR NEW PARTNER.
...
LET'S GO.
BOY, YOU ARE A BUNDLE OF LAUGHS, AIN'T YA? THIS IS GONNA BE A FUN-FILLED ROMP ACROSS THE STARS. I CAN JUST SEE IT NOW.
WHAT THE HELL BROUGHT YOU **ALL THE WAY** OUT HERE, ANYHOW? WHY'S THIS LITTLE BOT SO DAMN IMPORTANT TO YOU, BLONDIE?

MY NAME'S NOT BLONDIE. IT'S ANDY.
I USED TO LIVE HERE. AND THAT LITTLE BOT...HE USED TO BE MY BROTHER.

CHAPTER 8

THE OUTER FRINGES OF THE GNISHIAN SYSTEM.
BRRAAAP!
DO YOU EVER STOP EATING, BLUGGER?
DO YOU EVER STOP SULKING?
NO.
WELL, ME NEITHER, THEN.
THIS PIECE OF SCRAP GOT A NAME?
WHAT?
YOUR SHIP? YOU NAMED IT, DIDN'T YOU? EVERY SHIP NEEDS A NAME.
NOT EVERY SHIP.
BOY, YOU ARE A REAL STICK IN THE CRUD, ANDY MY MAN.
YOU DON'T LIKE BEING AROUND PEOPLE MUCH, DO YA?

ANDY! I WAS WORRIED SICK! WHY WEREN'T YOU AT THE CHILDREN'S CENTER?
I HATE IT THERE.
HONEY, THAT'S THE ONLY PLACE YOU CAN STAY WHEN I'M AT WORK IN THE MINES. YOU CAN'T JUST BE ALONE HERE IN YOUR ROOM ALL DAY.
WHY NOT?
BECAUSE. IT'S NOT HEALTHY **AND** IT'S AGAINST UGC RULES. YOU **NEED** TO BE SUPERVISED.
WHY DID WE EVEN HAVE TO COME HERE, MOM?! WHY COULDN'T WE JUST STAY ON NIYRATA?! I HATE THIS STUPID COLONY.
PLEASE, ANDY... I FEEL BAD ENOUGH FOR DRAGGING YOU OUT HERE. YOU **KNOW** I DO. BUT I HAVE TO GO WHERE THE WORK IS. THIS IS **WHAT I DO,** ANDY. THE MINES ARE IMPORTANT TO THE UGC... I'M **IMPORTANT** HERE.
YEAH, BUT I'M **NOT.** I'M JUST ALONE IN THE BASE ALL DAY.
THEN YOU HAVE TO TRY TO MAKE NEW FRIENDS.
I DON'T WANT TO.
YOU **HAVE** TO, ANDY. YOU HAVE TO AT LEAST **TRY.** FOR ME? PROMISE ME.
Trinket Taker

--SCRAP DOG! NO, WAIT...I THINK THERE'S ALREADY AT LEAST THREE OTHER SHIPS CALLED THE SCRAP DOG. HOW ABOUT? WAR FANG? COMET CRUSHER? DEATH FLOWER? BATTLE BANSHEE? THE IMPERIAL SCORPION? SPACE DAGGER?
OHH--I LIKE THAT! THE SPACE DAGGER!
WOULD YOU PLEASE SHUT UP...
...WE'VE GOT COMPANY!
WHAT'S GOING ON? SCAN MY ONBOARD. I'M REGISTERED.
WE ALREADY DID. IT DOESN'T MATTER. THIS IS AS FAR AS YOU GO, SCRAPPER.
SINCE THE ASSASSINATION, GNISHIAN SPACE IS OFF LIMITS TO EVERYONE. REGISTERED OR NOT. NO ONE GOES IN OR OUT.
ASSASSINATION?
WHERE'VE YOU BEEN?! THE HARDWIRE GOT KING S'NOK. GNISH HAS BROKEN OFF ALL CONTACT WITH THE UGC. WE ARE ON THE BRINK OF WAR.
DAMN IT. I DON'T CARE WHAT'S HAPPENED TO S'NOK. I AM GOING TO GNISH, BLUGGER. I WANT THAT BOT.
IF IT REALLY WAS THE HARDWIRE THERE MAY BE...THERE MAY BE MORE THAN JUST ONE LITTLE ROBBIE AT THE END OF THE TRAIL. WHAT ARE YOU THINKING, BLONDIE?
I'M THINKING IT'S GOING TO TAKE MORE THAN TWO UGC FIGHTERS TO STOP THE SPACE DAGGER. YOU IN?
HEH HEH. LET'S GET IN SOME TROUBLE, KID.

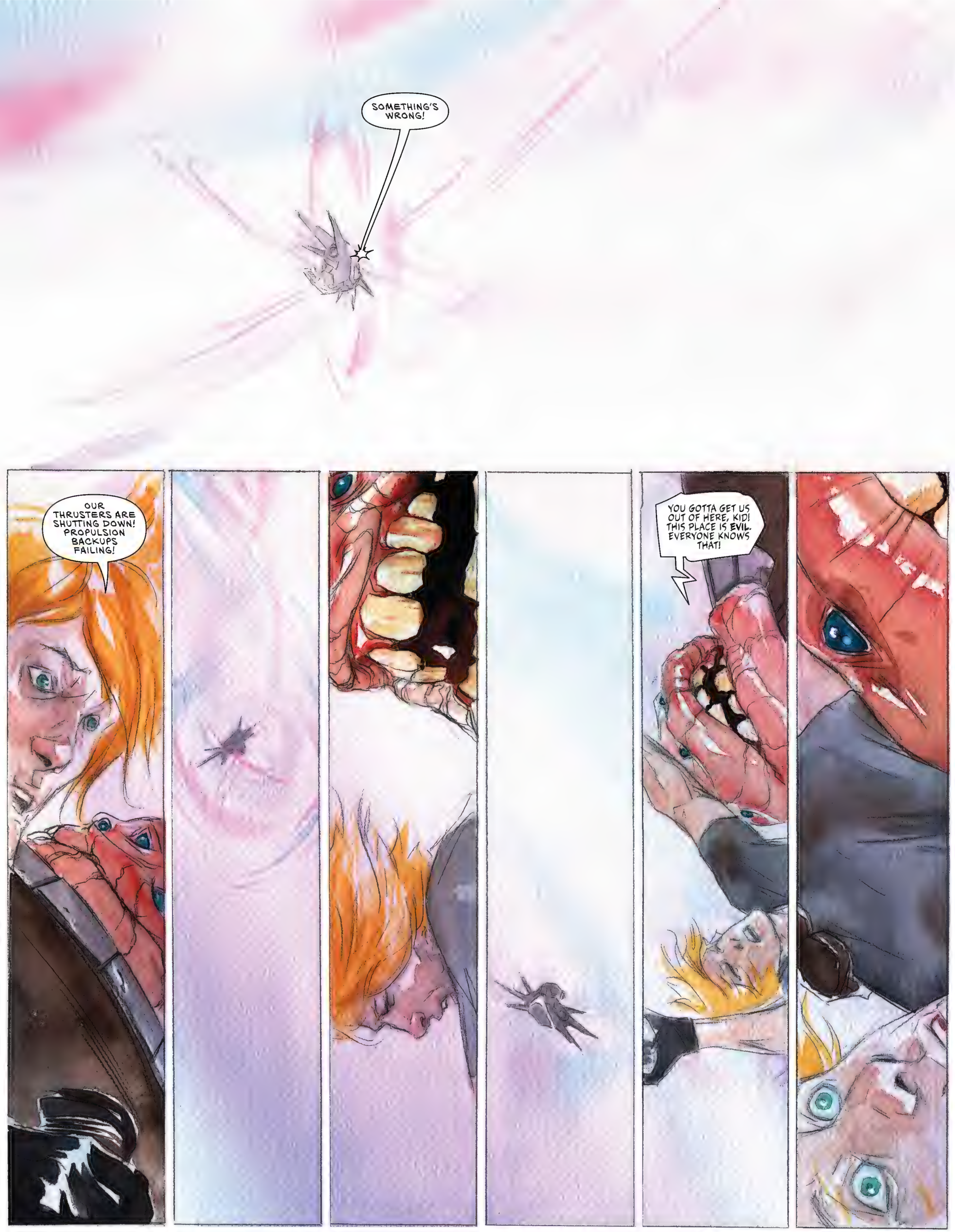
HELLO, I AM TIM-16.
I WAS DESIGNED AND DEVELOPED AT **QUONTECH.** I COMBINE THE VERY LATEST IN SYNTHETIC ANDROID TECHNOLOGY AND ADAPTABLE A.I., MAKING ME THE **VERY BEST** HUMAN COMPANION ROBOT AVAILABLE IN THE UGC TODAY, TOMORROW, AND FOR YEARS TO COME.
I AM PARTICULARLY ADEPT AT KEEPING CHILDREN COMPANY. I CAN BE YOUR CHILD'S BEST FRIEND, BROTHER, AND PROTECTOR. PARENTS, I CAN BE **YOUR** PIECE OF MIND.
LOOKING FOR A FEMALE MODEL OR ONE OF THE NONHUMAN RACES? I ALSO COME IN THE NEW ***TINA*** SERIES, AND MANY OTHER VARIATIONS ARE SOON TO FOLLOW.
I MAY COME FROM **QUONTECH,** BUT I CAN **BE** YOURS. BRING ME HOME TODAY.
PLEASE, MOM!
BUT, ANDY, YOU WON'T EVEN PLAY WITH THE **REAL CHILDREN** HERE ON THE COLONY.
THE KIDS HERE ARE STUPID, MOM. THEY'RE MEAN. IF I GOT A TIM, HE WOULD LIKE WHAT I LIKE. HE WOULD WANT TO DO WHAT I WANT TO DO! AND HE'S CERTIFIED. I WOULDN'T HAVE TO GO TO THE CARE CENTER WHEN YOU'RE WORKING!
I DON'T KNOW, ANDY. IT'S SO EXPENSIVE. WE'RE HERE SO WE CAN **SAVE** MONEY. AND WHAT IF WE DON'T LIKE HIM?
I WILL! I PROMISE! PLEASE, MOM! ***PLEEEASE!***

WOO-HOO!
THOOM
WHERE DID YOU LEARN TO SHOOT LIKE THAT, BLUGGER?
UGC FLIGHT ACADEMY.
CHOOM CHOOOM CHOOM
WHAT?! **YOU** WERE UGC?!
I'M MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE, BLONDIE.
OH SHIT!
RELAX, I ALMOST GOT HIM.
IT'S NOT JUST HIM...
SHIFTHOLE JUST OPENED UP! IT'S AN ENTIRE SQUADRON!

NOW, MOM?
HOLD ON, HOLD ON! THE SHIP HASN'T EVEN FINISHED LANDING YET!
DO YOU THINK HE'S EXCITED TOO, MOM?
I BET HE IS, ANDY.
A.TAVERS
MOM! THERE HE IS!
HELLO, ANDY TAVERS, MRS. TAVERS. I AM TIM-21.
ANDY, SLOW DOWN! DON'T RUN!

CHOOOM CHOOM
IS THAT AS FAST AS YOU CAN GO, ANDY?!
YOU WANNA DRIVE?!
I SHOOT, YOU DRIVE. JUST DRIVE BETTER!
CHOOM CHOOM
SHOOT BETTER!
THERE!
GNISH?! THEY CAN'T ENTER GNISHIAN SPACE, BUT IT'S STILL TOO FAR. THEY'LL GUN US DOWN LONG BEFORE WE GET THERE.
NOT GNISH-- PHAGES! WE CAN REACH THE PLANET PHAGES! THEY'LL NEVER FOLLOW US THERE.
ARE YOU CRAZY?! PHAGES IS HAUNTED!
NOTHING IS HAUNTED. BESIDES, WE'RE NOT GOING ALL THE WAY DOWN...JUST SKIMMING THE PLANET'S RINGS.
HOLD ON, HERE WE GO!

HELLO?
ANDY?
DID I SCARE YOU, TIM?
I DON'T REALLY GET SCARED, ANDY. MY SENSORS DETECTED YOU POINT-SIX SECONDS BEFORE YOU SAID "BOO."
WHAT'S THE POINT OF PLAYING HIDE AND SCARE IF YOU CAN'T GET SCARED?
TIM? WHAT ARE YOU DOING?


SOMETHING'S WRONG!
OUR THRUSTERS ARE SHUTTING DOWN! PROPULSION BACKUPS FAILING!
YOU GOTTA GET US OUT OF HERE, KID! THIS PLACE IS **EVIL.** EVERYONE KNOWS THAT!

ANDY!
ANDY! GET UP! WE HAVE TO GO! **NOW!**
MOM--?!
NOW, ANDY! THERE'S NO TIME!
MOMMY WHAT'S--
I DON'T KNOW! NO ONE DOES! SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAS HAPPENED. WE HAVE TO LEAVE NOW! THE SHUTTLES ARE ALREADY TAKING OFF! HURRY!
WHAT ABOUT TIM?!
WE CAN'T TAKE HIM! THERE'S NOT ENOUGH ROOM ON THE SHUTTLES!
NO! TIM!
NO, ANDY!
TIM!

...IT CAN'T BE.

...IT CAN'T BE.
IT CAN'T BE REAL.
MOM! WHAT--WHAT IS THAT!?
WE DON'T KNOW! SOME SORT OF ***MACHINES*** ARE ATTACKING THE UGC. NIYRATA IS IN TROUBLE. WE'VE LOST ALL CONTACT AND NOW THERE ARE REPORTS OF SOME KIND OF LEAK IN THE MINES! WE HAVE TO HURRY!

IT CAN'T BE REAL. THE SPECTRAL CITY... I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST A MYTH!
THAT AIN'T NO MYTH, KID.
D-DON'T MOVE, BLUGGER.
WHAT'S IT DOING?
I-I DON'T--
--KK!

HURRY, ANDY, THIS IS THE LAST SHUTTLE!
NOW, ANDY... I AM GOING TO NEED YOU TO BE VERY BRAVE FOR ME.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
THERE'S NOT ENOUGH ROOM ON THE SHUTTLE TO FIT EVERYONE, ANDY. AND I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO STOP THE LEAK IN THE MINES.
THERE ARE STILL HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE HERE, ANDY. IF I CAN SAVE THEM--
WHAT DO YOU... NO!
NO!
I'M SORRY, ANDY...I LOVE YOU. NO MATTER WHAT, I LOVE YOU!
NO! MOMMY, NO!
...NO MATTER WHAT.

--UNGH!
THE SHIP'S POWER IS BACK UP!
I--
WHAT THE HELL DID THAT THING DO TO YOU, KID?
I-I CAN'T. I SAW--

SCRAP THIS! I'M GETTING US THE HELL OUT OF HERE!
NO!
NO?!
THAT'S **GAS**. IF YOU USE THE THRUSTERS YOU'LL BLOW US BOTH TO HELL.
CONVECTION IMPULSE ONLY UNTIL WE GET CLEAR.
WRRRRRR
NOW! THRUSTERS!
CHOOM

THE UGC SQUADRON IS LONG GONE. WE DITCHED THEM.
WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED DOWN THERE?
I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT.
I JUST WANT TO FIND TI--
I JUST WANT TO FIND THAT ROBOT.
P.Tavers
...NO MATTER WHAT.

CHAPTER 9

SHIFTSPACE.
A network of wormholes used for faster-than-light space travel.
The COMMAND FLEET of THE HARDWIRE: The underground robot resistance.
ARRRGHHH! OH GOD, THAT HURTS!
OH, WOULD YOU STOP YOUR YELPING, QUON! WE BOTH KNOW IT DOESN'T HURT THAT BAD. THAT MED-BOT HAS YOU SO PUMPED FULL OF PAIN KILLERS--
I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU GO THROUGH THIS, TELSA!
UNLIKE YOU, I'M NOT A TRAITOR OR A LIAR. THAT'S WHY I DON'T GET MY EXTREMITIES CHOPPED OFF BY ANGRY KINGS.
You should be grateful, human. This is the finest [illegible]
GRATEFUL? THIS IS A HACK JOB, YOU TWO-BIT BEDPAN! I COULD DO BETTER IN MY SLEEP!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?
BANDIT AND DRILLER...WE JUST LEFT THEM BEHIND.
TIM, I THINK YOU NEED TO ADJUST YOUR EMOTION SETTINGS. WE'RE IN ENOUGH TROUBLE AS IT IS. I CAN'T HANDLE YOU MOPING AROUND TOO!
BANDIT WAS MY **BEST FRIEND!** AND I CAN'T JUST **ADJUST** MY EMOTION SETTINGS. THEY ARE ADAPTIVE. I LEARN FROM THOSE AROUND ME! ***THIS IS WHO I AM, CAPTAIN TELSA!***
SWIP
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
TO BE ALONE.
BUT WE DON'T EVEN KNOW THE SHIP--
I'LL GO WITH HIM.
I WOULDN'T WORRY, TELSA...IF TIM SPENDS MUCH MORE TIME AROUND ***YOU***, I'D SAY HIS EMOTION SETTINGS WILL ***DROP SIGNIFICANTLY.***
YOU WANNA FIND OUT IF THEY HAVE ***ANY MORE*** REPLACEMENT BODY PARTS AROUND HERE, QUON?

TIM-21... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
YES. I JUST--I MISS BANDIT.
I NEVER HAD A COMPANION PET. I DO NOT KNOW WHAT THAT MUST FEEL LIKE.
IT FEELS SAD.

DO YOU--DO YOU EVER WISH THAT WE WERE NOT MADE SO HUMAN-LIKE? THAT WE COULDN'T FEEL THINGS LIKE THEY DO? THAT WE COULD JUST BE **NORMAL ROBOTS?**
BUT OUR EMPATHY IS WHAT MAKES US ***SO SPECIAL,*** TIM-21. IT IS WHY THE TIM SERIES WAS CREATED IN THE FIRST PLACE.
IF PSIUS TEACHES US ANYTHING IN THE HARDWIRE, IT IS TO BE PROUD OF OUR FUNCTION. TO EMBRACE OUR PROGRAMMING.
WHAT WAS YOUR ASSIGNMENT, TIM-22? WHO WAS YOUR COMPANION BEFORE THE HARVESTERS CAME?
I WAS ASSIGNED TO AN ELDERLY MAN ON NIYRATA. I GAVE HIM HIS MEALS AND HIS MEDICATION AND HELPED HIM GET AROUND.
HE TOLD ME--HE TOLD ME I REMINDED HIM OF HIS SON. HIS OWN SON...HIS HUMAN SON WAS GROWN AND WAS AN AMBASSADOR ON SAMPSON. HE RARELY VISITED HIS FATHER.
IT IS FUNNY HOW HUMANS DO NOT CARE FOR THEIR ELDERLY. I THINK IF THEY COULD DISCARD THEM ONCE THEY BECAME FAULTY, THE WAY THEY DISCARD US, THEY WOULD.
THEY MEAN WELL. TELSA PROMISED ME SHE WOULD HELP ME FIND MY HUMAN BROTHER, ANDY, IF HE IS STILL ALIVE.
SHE MAY BE LACKING IN CERTAIN SOCIAL GRACES...BUT I DO TRUST HER.

I THINK MAYBE WE SHOULD TRY TO WEAR CLOTHING THAT IS A BIT LESS ALIKE, OR THEY MAY CONFUSE US FOR ONE ANOTHER, TIM-22.
HMM... I COULD ACCESS MY GROOMING SETTINGS...
HOW IS THIS? BETTER?
HA!
OR MAYBE RED? RED WAS PROGRAMMED AS MY **FAVORITE COLOR.**
YES, MINE AS WELL. BUT ANDY'S WAS BLUE. SO NOW MINE IS BLUE TOO. I--I MISS BANDIT AND ANDY.
I KNOW. BUT IT'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT, TIM-21.
I PROMISE.

THE PLANET GNISH.
Home world of The Scrappers and the only monarchy in the UGC.
KING S'NOK MEANT SO MUCH TO SO MANY OF US, AND HIS DEATH IS A HUGE LOSS FOR OUR BELOVED PLANET GNISH AND FOR THE ENTIRE GALAXY...
BUT TODAY IS NOT A DAY OF MOURNING. WE ARE HERE TO CELEBRATE. FOR WITH THE LOSS OF ONE KING... WE NOW PREPARE TO WELCOME HIS SUCCESSOR.
WITHOUT FURTHER ADO... LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PLEASE JOIN ME IN WELCOMING THE NEXT KING OF GNISH...
--HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS TO BE... PRINCE S'LOK, SON OF S'NOK!
PRINCE S'LOK... WILL YOU PLEASE APPROACH THE PODIUM.
OF COURSE, HONORABLE SPEAKER OF THE THRONE.

PRINCE S'LOK... DO YOU ACCEPT THE THRONE OF GNISH AND PLEDGE TO LEAD OUR PLANET AND OUR PEOPLE UNTIL YOUR FINAL BREATH?
I DO, LORD SPEAKER.
THEN IT IS MY PRIVILEGE TO PRESENT YOU WITH THIS...YOUR BELOVED FATHER'S HAIRPIECE. IT HAS ADORNED THE HEADS OF YOUR FAMILY FOR GENERATIONS. WILL YOU ACCEPT IT NOW UPON ***YOUR*** OWN HEAD...AND WITH IT ALL THE RESPONSIBILITY AND BURDEN OF THE THRONE?
I--I DO.
THEN I CALL YOU PRINCE NO MORE! FROM THIS DAY FORTH YOU SHALL BE ***KING S'LOK OF GNISH!***
AND IT IS HERE THAT I MAKE MY FIRST PLEDGE TO YOU, MY PEOPLE--I SHALL USE ALL OF OUR MIGHT TO HUNT DOWN AND DESTROY THE ***VILE MACHINES*** WHO SLEW MY FATHER!
I AM HEREBY ***DOUBLING*** ALL BOUNTIES ON ROBOTS AND ANDROIDS! AND GENEROUS REWARDS SHALL BE GIVEN TO ANYONE WHO CAN HELP LEAD THE GNISHIAN MILITARY TO THE SECRET WHEREABOUTS OF THE ROBOT RESISTANCE!
THE MACHINE AGE IS OVER! AND IF THE UGC OR ANYONE ELSE STANDS IN OUR WAY--
--THEY TOO WILL FALL UPON GNISHIAN SWORDS!
HEY, KID. YOU SEEN ENOUGH OF THIS CRAP YET?
MORE THAN ENOUGH, BLUGGER.
GOOD. 'CAUSE I DID SOME DIGGING, AND THINK I GOT US A LEAD ON OUR MISSING BOT.

--BRING IT ON, BIG BOY!
RRRRRRRRRRR
RRRRRRRRRR
RRRRRRRRRRRR
WHAT'S THE PLAN, DRILLER?
HRRM. THE PLAN IS YOU DUCK, HRRMAN.
I SAID DUCK!
BOOM

RRRRRRRRRRR
--BZZZXXKTZZ!!
CRASH
THOOM
HRRM...
SMASH
DRILLER A KILLER!
DRILLER A REAL KILLER!!!

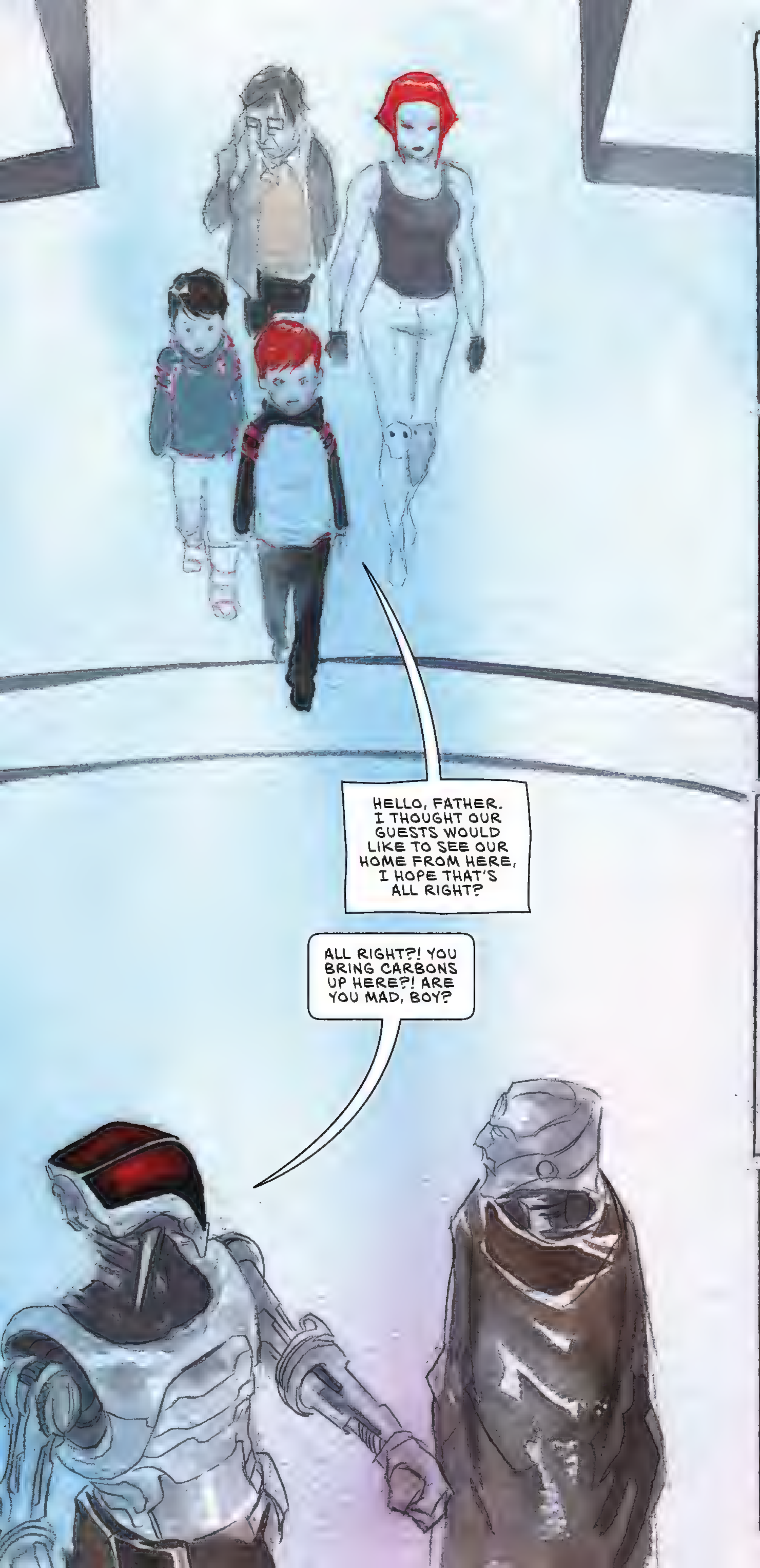
WHAT IS IT?
WHAT'RE YOU BARKING ABOUT NOW, YAPPY-BOT?
JUST MORE STINKIN' HRRMANS. WE ALREADY FOUGHT TODAY. LEAVE US ALONE!
BANDIT!
YOU KNOW THAT LITTLE THING? IT WAS WITH THE BOY-BOT ON DIRISHU.
I--HE WAS MY DOG. OUR DOG...TIM AND MINE.
YOU OKAY, KID?
OF COURSE. JUST A SILLY TOY. NOT WORTH ITS WEIGHT IN SCRAP.

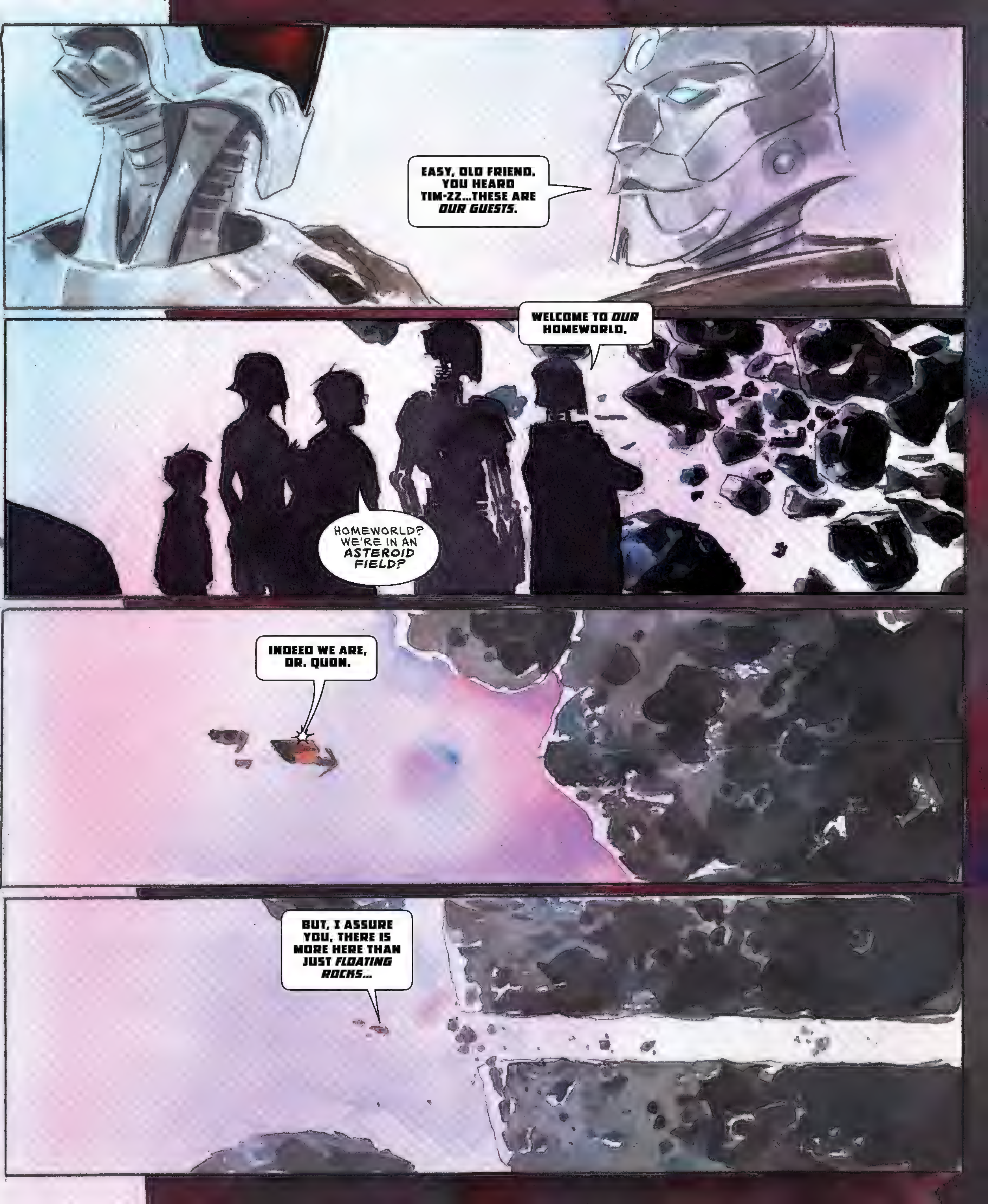
YOU'RE UGC. WHY ARE YOU WITH THESE BOTS?
WHAT'S IT TO YOU, SCRAP DOG?
YOU WANNA START CALLING ME NAMES TOO, LITTLE MAN? I'LL EAT YOUR FRIGGIN' HEAD. ANSWER HIM!
MAYBE YOU TELL US HOW YOU CAME TO BE WITH THIS BOT AND WHERE HIS COMPANION WENT, AND WE SEE ABOUT GETTING YOU OUT OF THAT CELL?
I DON'T CUT DEALS WITH SCRAPPERS.
LOOK...I'M SEARCHING FOR TIM-21. I KNEW HIM, A LONG TIME AGO. HE WAS MY COMPANION.
WAIT--YOU'RE ANDY?
HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME?
TIM-21. HE TOLD US ABOUT YOU. HE WANTED US TO HELP FIND YOU IF YOU WERE STILL ALIVE.

THEY TOOK TIM-21 TO THE PALACE, ALONG WITH MY COMMANDING OFFICER. BUT THERE WAS A TERRORIST STRIKE OR SOMETHING.
NEWSFEEDS ARE SAYING IT WAS THE HARDWIRE. THEY KILLED S'NOK. CHANCES ARE THEY TOOK THE BOT TOO. REPORTS SAID THEY TOOK A HUMAN, A SAMPSONITE, AND A ROBOT IN THE RAID.
A SAMPSONITE-- TELSA! WELL, THAT'S IT, THEN. WE'LL NEVER SEE THEM AGAIN. THE UGC HAS BEEN LOOKING FOR THE HARDWIRE FOR YEARS. ***NO ONE*** KNOWS WHERE THEY ARE.
HOLD ON... BANDIT WAS TIM'S DOG-BOT, THEY WERE CHIP-CONNECTED SO BANDIT COULDN'T GET LOST IN THE MINES.
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, KID?
I'M ***SAYING,*** IF THE TRACKER CHIP CAN BE REVERSED, BANDIT CAN LEAD US RIGHT TO THE HARDWIRE AND TO TIM-21.
YOU KNOW HOW TO DO ALL THAT TECHY STUFF, KID?
NO... BUT MY ***EX-WIFE*** DOES.

DO YOU THINK WE CAN REALLY TRUST THIS PSIUS? I'VE HEARD OF SOME OF THE GUERRILLA ATTACKS THAT HAVE BEEN ATTRIBUTED TO THE HARDWIRE...THESE ARE **NOT** NICE ROBOTS, TELSA.
OH, THAT'S RICH, QUON. ***YOU*** TALKING ABOUT TRUST.
WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS, TELSA! YOU CAN PUT ME ON TRIAL WHEN WE GET OUT OF THIS MESS. RIGHT NOW WE JUST NEED A PLAN!
GOD KNOWS WHERE THE HARDWIRE'S HOME IS HIDDEN. WE NEED TO GET TIM AND GET AWAY FROM HERE!
THIS TIM-22... DOES HE HAVE THE SAME MACHINE CODEX AS TIM-21? THE SAME ONE AS THE HARVESTERS?
YES. I BUILT THEM ALL USING THE ANCIENT ROBOT'S TEMPLATE. WHY?
WORSE COMES TO WORSE, WE JUST NEED TO ESCAPE WITH ***ONE OF THEM***, THEN.
TELSA! SURELY YOU WOULDN'T LEAVE TIM-21?

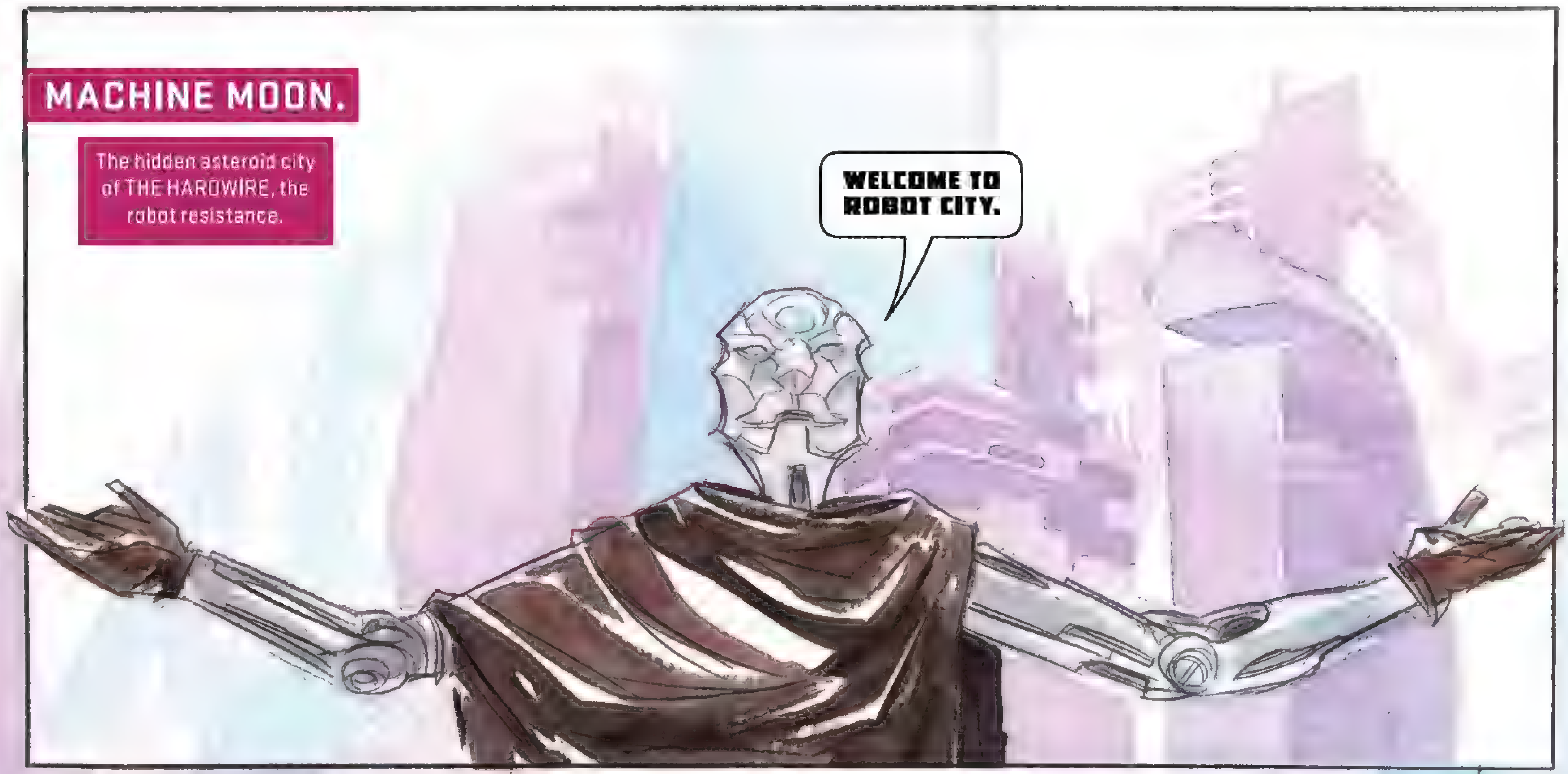
SWIP
TIM, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
YES. I'M BETTER. I'M SORRY I SNAPPED AT YOU, CAPTAIN TELSA.
THAT'S-- THAT'S OKAY.
WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO YOUR HEAD?
I ADAPTED TO AVOID CONFUSION.
HA! I KNEW THAT WOULD BE A NICE FEATURE WHEN I DESIGNED IT!
WE CAME TO LET YOU KNOW THAT WE ARE ABOUT TO DROP OUT OF SHIFTSPACE! WE ARE ALMOST HOME!
I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO COME UP TO MY FATHER'S PERSONAL OBSERVATION DECK WITH US.
"THE VIEW IS INCREDIBLE FROM UP THERE."
NOW EXITING SHIFTSPACE, COMMANDER PSIUS. READINGS SHOW NO SIGN OF HUMAN LIFE WITHIN RANGE OF THE EXIT POINT. WE ARE SAFE TO MAKE OUR RETURN.
EXCELLENT. I MUST ADMIT, SEMPER, I EXPECTED THE GNISHIANS TO GIVE US MORE OF A CHASE. THE DEATH OF THEIR KING WAS AN UNEXPECTED DISTRACTION.

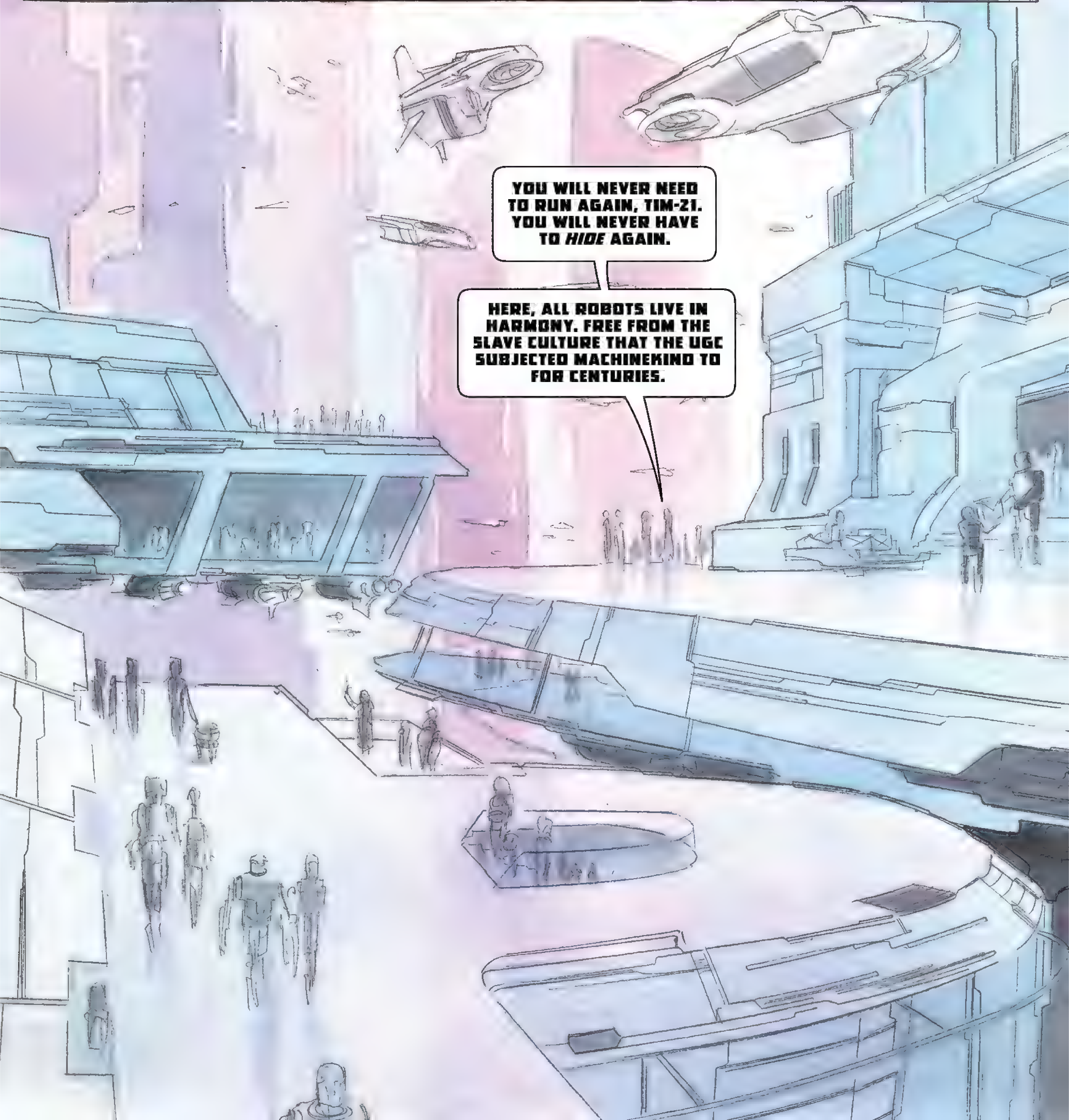

HELLO, FATHER. I THOUGHT OUR GUESTS WOULD LIKE TO SEE OUR HOME FROM HERE, I HOPE THAT'S ALL RIGHT?
ALL RIGHT?! YOU BRING CARBONS UP HERE?! ARE YOU MAD, BOY?


EASY, OLD FRIEND. YOU HEARD TIM-22...THESE ARE *OUR GUESTS*.
WELCOME TO *OUR* HOMEWORLD.
HOMEWORLD? WE'RE IN AN *ASTEROID FIELD?*
INDEED WE ARE, DR. QUON.
BUT, I ASSURE YOU, THERE IS MORE HERE THAN JUST *FLOATING ROCKS*...

WELCOME TO THE *MACHINE MOON,* TIM-21...
WELCOME HOME.

CHAPTER 10


MACHINE MOON.
The hidden asteroid city of THE HARDWIRE, the robot resistance.
WELCOME TO ROBOT CITY.


YOU WILL NEVER NEED TO RUN AGAIN, TIM-21. YOU WILL NEVER HAVE TO *HIDE* AGAIN.
HERE, ALL ROBOTS LIVE IN HARMONY. FREE FROM THE SLAVE CULTURE THAT THE UGC SUBJECTED MACHINEKIND TO FOR CENTURIES.

THAT'S ALL FINE AND WELL, PSIUS, BUT YOU MUST REALIZE *WE CAN'T STAY HERE.*
OF COURSE NOT, CAPTAIN TELSA. BUT YOU ALSO MUST UNDERSTAND THAT, NOW THAT YOU'VE SEEN WHERE THE HARDWIRE IS, WE CANNOT SIMPLY LET YOU LEAVE. WE NEED TO TAKE CERTAIN PRECAUTIONS.
AND WE WENT TO A GREAT RISK TO BRING TIM-21 HERE. WHETHER HE WANTS TO STAY, OR LEAVE WITH YOU, IS HIS CHOICE. WE ARE NOT JAILERS.
THE HARDWIRE ARE *TERRORISTS,* PSIUS. FORGIVE ME IF I FIND THAT HARD TO BELIEVE.
WE ARE NOT TERRORISTS, CAPTAIN. WE ARE *SURVIVALISTS.* WE WILL DO WHAT IT TAKES TO ENSURE MACHINEKIND ENDURES. BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN WE SEE ALL HUMANS AS THE ENEMY. UNLIKE YOU, WE ARE CAPABLE OF BEING *RATIONAL.*

WELL, TIM-21, IF FINDING THIS HUMAN-- *THIS ANDY*--IS IMPORTANT TO *YOU*, THEN IT'S IMPORTANT TO *US* AS WELL.
BUT I WOULD ASK YOU A FAVOR...WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR MORE ABOUT THIS "DREAM" YOU HAD. PERHAPS RUN A *FEW TESTS* ON YOU? BEFORE YOU GO.
TELSA PROMISED ME SHE WOULD HELP ME FIND ANDY. THAT'S WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO ME.
TESTS? WHAT KIND OF TESTS?
NOTHING HARMFUL. YOU ARE WELCOME TO HELP US OVERSEE THE PROCESS, DOCTOR QUON. BUT THIS WORLD THAT TIM-21 DESCRIBED... THIS PLACE WHERE ALL THE DESTROYED ROBOTS DWELL...
WE THINK IT MAY BE *REAL*.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WE HAVE HEARD RUMORS, DOCTOR... A SECRET SERVER WHERE THE UGC HAS STORED THE BACKUP MEMORIES OF ALL THE DEAD A.I.S.
YOU'RE--YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT A "ROBOT HEAVEN"? I'M SORRY, PSIUS, BUT AT THE TIME OF THE ATTACKS, I PRACTICALLY RAN THE UGC'S ROBOT AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE DIVISION. THERE IS NO SUCH PLACE.
SURELY YOU MUST ADMIT THAT THE POSSIBILITY IS TOO GREAT TO IGNORE. IF THERE WAS A CHANCE OF BRINGING BACK ALL THOSE WE LOST...
I DON'T MIND DOING TESTS, DOCTOR QUON. I JUST WANT TO HELP.
FINE, BUT QUON SUPERVISES.
CERTAINLY. WE ARE HONORED TO HAVE HIS EXPERTISE.
YEAH, WELL...THE GOOD DOCTOR MAY NOT BE THE MAN YOU THINK HE IS, PSIUS.
TELSA, PLEASE!

WELL, THEN, I'M SURE OUR GUESTS WOULD LIKE TO FRESHEN UP.
OBVIOUSLY WE ARE NOT USED TO LODGING HUMANS, BUT WE WILL MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR YOU.
THANKS.
TIM-22, PERHAPS YOU CAN SHOW TIM-21 YOUR ROOM?
SURE! TIM, YOU WANNA STAY WITH ME? IT WILL BE FUN! I HAVE LOTS OF COOL GAMES.
CAN I, CAPTAIN TELSA?
I'M NOT YOUR MOTHER, TIM. DO WHATEVER YOU WANT.
YEAH! COME ON, 21--I CAN'T WAIT TO SHOW YOU EVERYTHING!

THE PLANET SAMPSON.
Home to the original colonists from Old Earth. Sampson was also home to the largest human cities before the Harvester attacks.
TELL ME AGAIN WHY WE NEEDED THOSE TWO? SHOULD HAVE SCRAPPED THE BIG ONE AND LEFT THE UGC STOOGE ON GNISH.
BIG TALK, SCRAP DOG. WHY DON'T YOU UNSTRAP ME AND SEE HOW TOUGH YOU ARE.
HRRM...YEAH. TAKE OFF THIS MAGNO-COLLAR AND DRILLER'LL SCRAP *YOUR HEAD,* BIG MOUTH.
QUIET.
I BROUGHT MR. TULLIS BECAUSE KILLING A UGC OFFICER WOULD GET BOTH OUR LICENSES REVOKED. WE'LL DROP HIM OFF SOMEWHERE.
AND WE BROUGHT DRILLER BECAUSE BANDIT HAD A FIT WHEN WE TRIED TO LEAVE HIM. AND WE NEED BANDIT.
ARF!

YEAH, ABOUT THAT...YOU SAID YOUR EX-WIFE WAS GONNA HELP US, KID. SO WHY THE BLAZES ARE WE ON SAMPSON? THIS PLACE GOT HIT HARDEST BY THE HARVESTERS.
AIN'T NO ONE LEFT ON SAMPSON 'CEPT A BUNCH OF WHACKOS.
EXACTLY.
EXACTLY WHAT?
WE CAME TO SEE A BUNCH OF WHACKOS.
FWIP
HEY!
THWAP
WHACKOS?

I WARNED YOU ABOUT THAT SORT OF LANGUAGE THE LAST TIME I SAW YOU, ANDY.
WE ARE **THE BETWEEN.** THIS IS OUR HOME. SHOW RESPECT, **OR LEAVE.**
ARF?

YOU BROUGHT US TO A TWIBBIN' CYBORG CULT?! I'M GONNA LOSE MY LUNCH!!
I'M SORRY, EFFIE. MY FRIEND ISN'T THE MOST--
YOU WILL TELL THIS LUMP OF FLESH TO SHUT HIS GIANT MOUTH, OR I'LL DO IT FOR HIM.
WHOA-- WHOA! SORRY, SORRY!
SORRY, EFFIE-- PLEASE. WE COME IN PEACE. I JUST WANT TO TALK.
I TOLD YOU... I WILL NOT RESPOND TO MY ***FLESH NAME*** ANYMORE. IF YOU WANT TO TALK TO ME, YOU CALL ME BY MY ***ARTIFICIAL*** NAME.

...FINE.
QUEEN BETWEEN. I NEED TO TALK TO YOU. I **NEED** YOUR HELP.
BETTER.
LET'S GO, THEN...WE HAVE QUITE A HIKE AHEAD OF US IF WE WANT TO GET BACK TO THE COLONY BEFORE SUNRISE.
WHAT HAPPENS AT SUNRISE?
SOLAR WORMS. BIG ONES.
TERRIFIC.
HRRRN...DRILLER DON'T LIKE WRRRMS.

CRACK
TIM-22? IS THAT YOU?
FOOOM FOOM
DAAAAAAAARRR!

HI-YA!!
-RRRR!!
USE YOUR SWORD, TIM-21! IT ONLY COSTS SIX CREDS! TAKE OUT THE DRAGON'S FEET!
OKAY-- BUT I--
BLEEP
I DON'T REALLY LIKE THIS. CAN WE STOP NOW? PLEASE?

SORRY. IT'S A LITTLE TOO SCARY FOR ME.
IT'S OKAY. I HAVE LOTS OF OTHER GAMES TOO.
MAYBE I JUST DON'T REALLY LIKE GAMES THAT MUCH. BACK ON DIRISHU, MOM DIDN'T WANT US PLAYING GAMES. ANDY AND I MOSTLY READ AND DREW AND WROTE OUR OWN STORIES AND STUFF.
I LIKE READING! I HAVE OVER A THOUSAND BOOKS ON MY PROJO. WANT TO READ WITH ME?
ACTUALLY...I HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU.
MOM USED TO GET ANDY AND ME REAL BOOKS! I BROUGHT ONE WITH ME.
Trinket Tocket
OH, *TRINKET TOCKET!* YEAH, I WATCHED ALL THE HOLOS! I LOVE THESE TOO!
THIS IS SO...WEIRD. I'VE NEVER SEEN A BOOK **ON PAPER.**
WHY DO YOU LIKE READING THEM LIKE THIS? FEELS SO...FAKE.
I DON'T KNOW. MOM USED TO READ THEM TO ANDY AND ME BEFORE BED. I GREW TO ENJOY IT.

TIM...YOU KNOW THEY WEREN'T REALLY YOUR FAMILY, RIGHT? I MEAN, PSIUS ISN'T MY FATHER EITHER, BUT AT LEAST HERE WE ARE **ALL MACHINES.**
BUT THEY **WERE** MY REAL FAMILY. AT LEAST THEY BECAME MY FAMILY.
OKAY. I'M SORRY. I DIDN'T MEAN TO MAKE YOU FEEL BAD.
THAT'S ALL RIGHT.
COME ON-- I WANT TO SHOW YOU MORE STUFF!
OKAY.
Trinket Tocket
And His Tin Rocket
This book belongs to:
ANDY TAVERS
AND
TIM-21
his book belo
ANDY TA

SWIP
THERE YOU ARE.
TELSA.
I WAS LOOKING ALL OVER FOR YOU--WHAT THE HELL *IS* THIS PLACE?
PSIUS'S PERSONAL SCULPTURE GARDEN.
SCULPTURE GARDEN?
YES, APPARENTLY THE HARDWIRE SALVAGED A FEW AMUNIAN ARTBOTS. PSIUS TOLD ME HE COMMISSIONED THESE TO REPRESENT ALL OF THE FALLEN ROBOTS. ALL OF THE CULLED. AMAZING TO THINK THAT MACHINES WOULD--
GAH--WOULD YOU ***PLEASE*** SHUT UP.
EXCUSE ME?
DON'T YOU GET IT, QUON? THE LIVING QUARTERS...THE SCULPTURE GARDENS... WE ARE NEVER GETTING OUT OF HERE. THEY'VE ALREADY SEPARATED US FROM TIM. I'D BE SURPRISED IF WE LAST THE NIGHT.
GEE, I'M GLAD YOU'RE STAYING POSITIVE, TELSA. NICE PEP TALK.
THEY DON'T ***NEED*** US, QUON.
EVEN IF WE EVER DO GET OUT OF THIS, MY FATHER WILL ***NEVER*** LET ME LIVE THIS DOWN. I REALLY MESSED THIS MISSION UP.
YOUR FATHER IS PROBABLY WORRIED SICK ABOUT YOU.
MY FATHER NEVER WANTED ME TO JOIN THE UGC. AND NO ONE ELSE EVER TOOK ME SERIOUSLY. THEY THOUGHT I'D BEEN HANDED EVERYTHING. TRUTH IS, I HAD TO WORK TWICE AS HARD TO MAKE CAPTAIN.

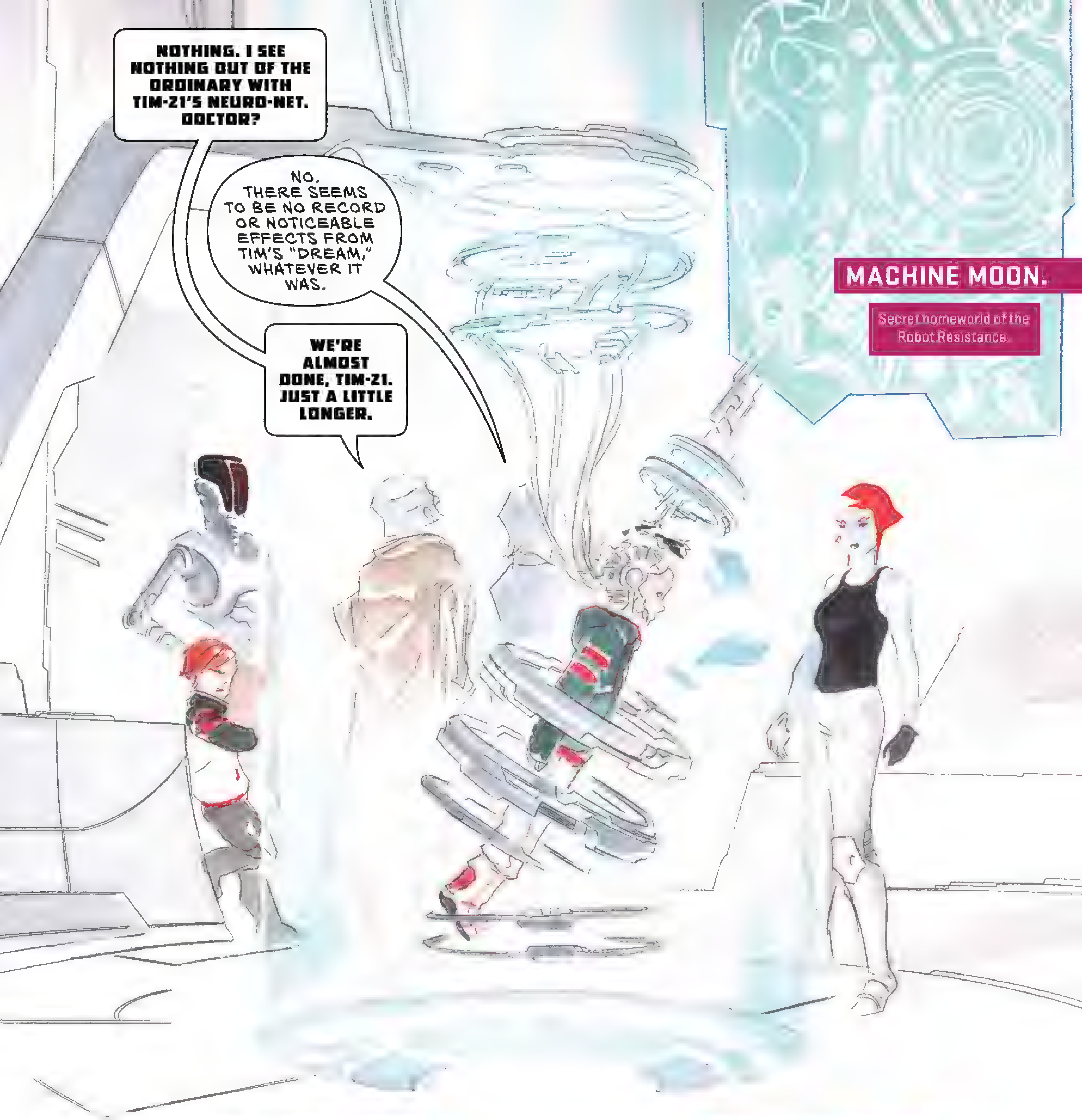
I'M SORRY. I KNOW HOW HARD IT CAN BE TO HAVE TO LIVE UP TO IMPOSSIBLE EXPECTATIONS.
WE ARE **NOTHING** ALIKE, QUON. YOU **LIED** AND **STOLE** TO MAKE YOUR NAME. I WORKED MY ASS OFF TO GET TO WHERE I AM.
YOU DESERVE EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU. SO DON'T YOU **DARE** COMPARE YOURSELF TO ME!
LOOK, ARGUING ISN'T GOING TO GET US ANYWHERE.
DID YOU EVER STOP TO THINK THAT MAYBE PSIUS IS TELLING THE TRUTH? THAT THEY WANT TO WORK ***WITH US?***
YOU SURE THEY DIDN'T REPLACE YOUR BRAIN WHEN THEY GAVE YOU THAT HAND, DOC?!
WE ARE BEHIND ENEMY LINES, QUON.
YOU BETTER PICK A SIDE SOON. BECAUSE I'M NOT PLANNING ON STICKING AROUND...
...AND WHEN PSIUS FINDS OUT YOU'RE A FRAUD, HE MAY NOT BE SO WELCOMING.

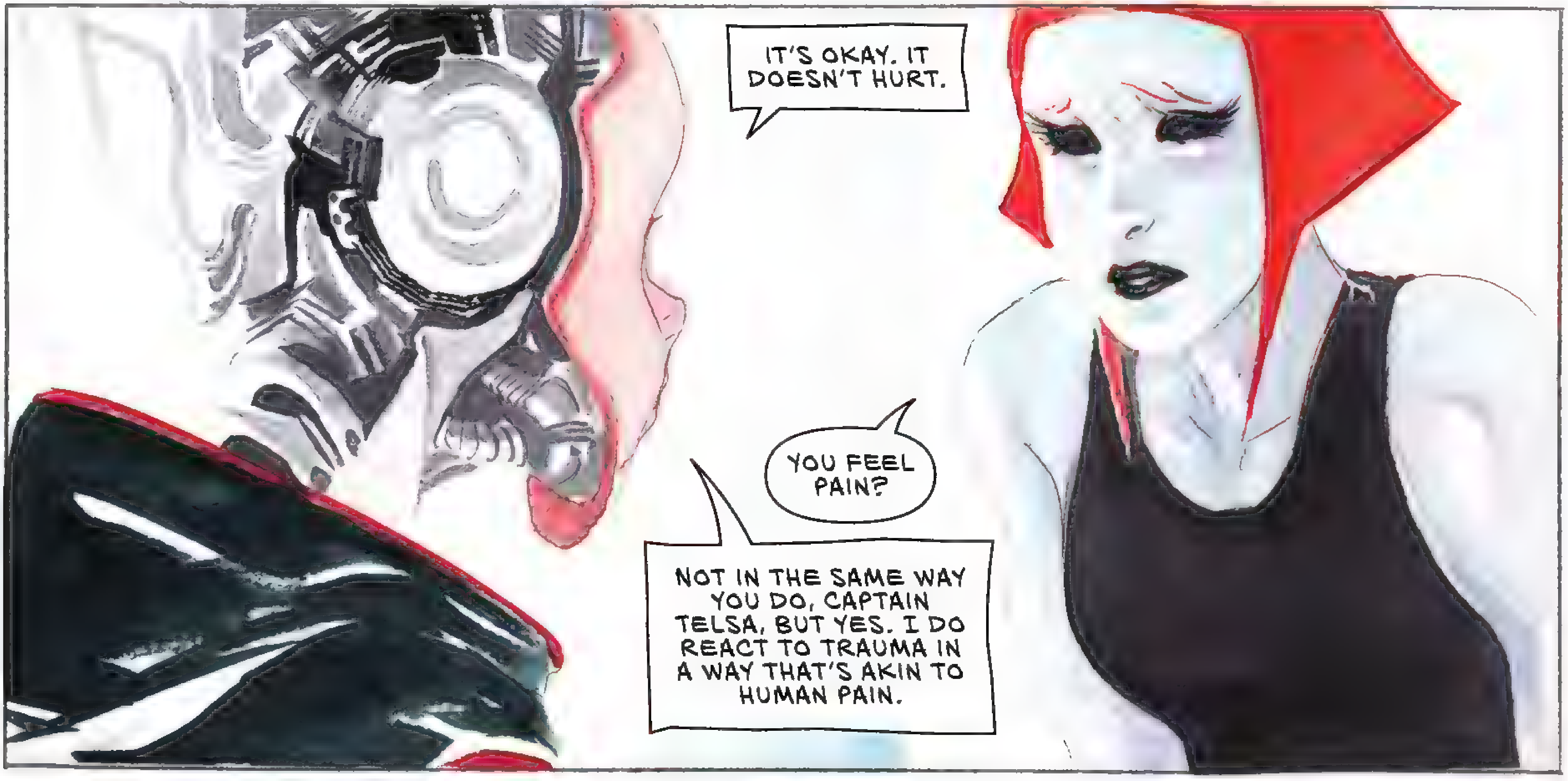
NO WORD FROM MY DAUGHTER YET?
NO, GENERAL. STILL NOTHING. BUT IF THE REPORTS FROM GNISH ARE TO BE BELIEVED, SHE MAY HAVE BEEN TAKEN BY THE HARDWIRE IN THEIR RAID.
THE PLANET NIYRATA.
Former technological and cultural hub of the UGC and home of the nine **Embassy Cities** and the UGC.
AND SINCE WHEN DO WE BELIEVE ***ANYTHING*** THE DAMNED GNISHIANS REPORT?! THOSE OVERSTUFFED ***SPACE SWINE*** WILL DO ANYTHING TO DESTABILIZE THE UGC!
I--I'M SORRY. OF COURSE, GENERAL NAGOKI, SIR. IT'S JUST THAT WE HAVEN'T HEARD FROM HER SINCE THE RAID, AND HER SHIP IS OFF THE GRID.
TELSA WAS NEVER CUT OUT FOR THE UGC! BUT SHE'S STUBBORN LIKE HER MOTHER WAS. GOOD THING I SENT TULLIS WITH HER. HE'LL GET THEM BACK. HE'S ONE OF THE BEST SOLDIERS IN THE FLEET.
LET ME KNOW AS SOON AS YOU HEAR ANYTHING!
YES, GENERAL.
I'M SORRY TO KEEP YOU ALL WAITING. UPDATE ME--WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?
WHAT DO YOU THINK WE'RE TALKING ABOUT, NAGOKI...THIS BUFFOON IS NOW IN CHARGE OF GNISH! WE NEED TO ACT BEFORE PRINCE ***S'LOK*** DOES!

YOU MEAN **KING** S'LOK. GODS HELP US. S'NOK WAS A DEVIOUS BASTARD, BUT HIS SON IS AN OUTRIGHT ***LUNATIC.*** HE'S ALREADY MOBILIZED THE GNISHIAN FLEET AND IS THREATENING TO ENTER SAMPSONITE SPACE ANY DAY!
AS BAD AS THE SITUATION ON GNISH IS, I'M AFRAID WE MAY HAVE BIGGER PROBLEMS AT HAND.
BIGGER THAN GALACTIC WAR, AMBASSADOR TELEMA?
I BELIEVE THE AMBASSADOR FROM SILENOS HAS SOMETHING VERY URGENT TO BRING TO THE COUNCIL'S ATTENTION?
THANK YOU, TELEMA. YOU ALL KNOW IT IS NOT OUR WAY TO INTERRUPT. BUT IN RECENT DAYS MANY OF OUR STRONGEST PROGNOSTICS HAS HAD A COMMON VISION. ONE THAT IS ***EXTREMELY*** TROUBLING.
WELL, THINK UP, OLD MAN. WHAT IS IT THAT HAS YOU SO SPOOKED?
I BELIEVE IT MAY BE BETTER TO ***SHOW YOU.***
AS YOU ALL KNOW, THE PRECOGNITIVE ABILITIES OF OUR RACE ARE STRONGEST AMONGST OUR YOUNG, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO DID NOT LIVE THROUGH THE PSYCHIC SHOCK OF THE HARVESTER ATTACKS.
A GROUP OF OUR MOST GIFTED HAVE TRAVELED WITH ME TODAY.
CHILDREN... PLEASE SHOW THEM. PROJECT YOUR VISION INTO THEIR MINDS.
DO WE HAVE TO? IT'S SCARY.
I KNOW, YOUNG ONES. BUT THEY ***NEED*** TO SEE WHAT YOU ALL SAW...

THAT **THE HARVESTERS ARE RETURNING**...AND THIS ROBOT...TIM-21-- HE IS **THE ONE WHO WILL BRING THEM!**

CHAPTER II


MACHINE MOON.
Secret homeworld of the Robot Resistance.
NOTHING. I SEE NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY WITH TIM-21'S NEURO-NET. DOCTOR?
NO. THERE SEEMS TO BE NO RECORD OR NOTICEABLE EFFECTS FROM TIM'S "DREAM," WHATEVER IT WAS.
WE'RE ALMOST DONE, TIM-21. JUST A LITTLE LONGER.


IT'S OKAY. IT DOESN'T HURT.
YOU FEEL PAIN?
NOT IN THE SAME WAY YOU DO, CAPTAIN TELSA, BUT YES. I DO REACT TO TRAUMA IN A WAY THAT'S AKIN TO HUMAN PAIN.

THIS IS BORING. ARE WE ALMOST DONE, FATHER?
THAT IS ENOUGH, TIM-22! IF YOU CAN'T BEHAVE, GO TO YOUR ROOM AND REBOOT.
I--I AM SORRY, FATHER.
DISCOVERING THE TRUTH ABOUT TIM-21'S "DREAM" MAY HELP UNLOCK THE SECRETS OF THE HARVESTERS...
...OR EVEN PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF THE SHADOW SERVER, WHERE I BELIEVE THE *MEMORIES* OF ALL OF THE DESTROYED ROBOTS LIE.
QUON ALREADY TOLD YOU NO SHADOW SERVER EXISTED IN THE UGC.
MAYBE NOT... BUT THERE ARE WORLDS BEYOND THE ONE WE *KNOW*, CAPTAIN.
AND YOU SAY YOU BASED THE TIM SERIES AND ALL OF OUR ADAPTIVE UPGRADES ON THIS ANCIENT ROBOT YOU DISCOVERED ON OSTRAKON, DR. QUON?
YES.
UPGRADES?
THE TIM SERIES WAS A MASSIVE BREAKTHROUGH.
FOR YEARS AFTER, I USED WHAT I'D LEARNED TO UPGRADE THE EMOTIVE AND ADAPTIVE ABILITIES OF MOST EXISTING ROBOTS ALL ACROSS THE UGC.
BEFORE TIM, ROBOTS WERE NOT NEARLY AS... "HUMAN."
WATCH YOUR MOUTH!
EASY, SEMPER.
AFTER ALL, DR. QUON COULD NOT BE MORE MISTAKEN. HE JUST ADMITTED THAT OUR PERSONALITIES AND NATURE WERE BASED ON *ANOTHER* ROBOT--THE ANCIENT ROBOT *HE STOLE*--NOT HUMANS.

NO HUMAN COULD HAVE CREATED A MACHINE THIS COMPLEX.
OH PLEASE! I MAY HAVE STOLEN THE RESEARCH, BUT I STILL DID THE WORK! IT WAS ME WHO USED IT TO UPGRADE ROBOTS LIKE YOU, PSIUS.
I RECOGNIZE YOUR DESIGN, PSIUS. WHAT WERE YOU BEFORE YOU BECAME LEADER OF THE HARDWIRE? A REPAIR BOT? A CULINARY BOT PERHAPS?
...
WHAT I WAS NO LONGER MATTERS, DOCTOR. THE HARVESTERS CHANGED EVERYTHING.
ARE WE DONE HERE?
YES. FOR NOW.
FATHER, MAY I TAKE TIM-21 ON A TOUR OF THE INNER CORE? I THINK HE WOULD ENJOY IT.
HE'S NOT GOING ANYWHERE ELSE WITHOUT ME.
I TOLD YOU, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE ON OUR HOMEWORLD AS LONG AS YOU STAY WITHIN THE QUARANTINED AREAS. TIM-21, HOWEVER, IS FREE TO DO AS HE PLEASES. AS ARE ALL ROBOTS HERE.
IT'S OKAY, CAPTAIN TELSA. IT WOULD BE GOOD TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS PLACE.

DON'T BE LONG, TIM.
I WON'T.
WHAT ARE YOU SMIRKING AT?!
IF I DIDN'T KNOW BETTER, I'D SAY YOU'RE STARTING TO GET A LITTLE ATTACHED TO TIM-21, TELSA. IMAGINE, A MACHINE MELTING YOUR HEART.
HEY!
AND IF I DIDN'T KNOW BETTER, I'D THINK YOU WANTED TO LOSE ALL YOUR TEETH, DOC.

CAPTAIN, PLEASE. THESE OUTBURSTS WILL NOT BE--
SHUT UP, PSIUS! I'VE HAD ENOUGH OF YOUR PATRONIZING CRAP!
HOW **LONG** DO YOU INTEND ON KEEPING US HERE?
AS LONG AS IT TAKES. WHEN TIM-21 HELPS US GET WHAT WE WANT, I WILL RETURN YOU TO THE UGC, CAPTAIN.
BESIDES...HE HARDLY SEEMS TO MIND. UNLESS *I'M* MISTAKEN, I WOULD SAY HE HAS REALLY TAKEN TO THE HARDWIRE.
YOU CAN SELL THAT "QUARANTINE" CRAP TO TIM, PSIUS, BUT I KNOW WHAT WE ARE...WE'RE ***PRISONERS.***
DON'T GET TOO COMFORTABLE, QUON. THE SECOND THEY GET WHAT THEY WANT, HE'LL ***KILL US BOTH.***

THE PLANET SAMPSON.
Home to the original colonists from Old Earth, Sampson was also home to the largest human cities before the Harvester attacks.
ANDY, THIS PLACE IS FARTHER THAN I THOUGHT. DON'T FORGET WHERE WE PARKED THE SPACE DAGGER.
THE HELL IS A SPACE DAGGER?
IT'S WHAT WE NAMED OUR SHIP.
NO, BLUGGER-- IT'S WHAT YOU NAMED MY SHIP.
DON'T MIND HIM. HE GETS GRUMPY IF WE SKIP BREAKFAST.

YOU'RE QUIET.
DRILLER AIN'T GOT NOTHING TO SAY. DRILLER DON'T LIKE THESE HALF-HRRMANS. DRILLER DON'T LIKE NONE OF THIS.
NEITHER DOES THE YAPPY BOT.
YEAH, I DON'T MUCH LIKE THESE ROBOFREAKS, EITHER, BUT YOU'VE BARELY SAID A WORD SINCE BACK ON GNISH WHEN THE BLOND ONE SHOWED UP.
MAYBE YOU TALK TOO MUCH, HRRRMAN. YOU EVER THINK ABOUT THAT?

HOW MUCH FURTHER, EFFIE?
I TOLD YOU. IT'S QUEEN BETWEEN NOW.
COME ON, EFF. IT'S **ME.**
YES, IT'S YOU. A **MURDERER.**
I'M A SCRAPPER. **NOT** A KILLER.
MACHINE LIFE IS **STILL LIFE,** ANDY.
HAVE YOU BEEN HERE SINCE--SINCE THE LAST TIME I SAW YOU?
YES. MOST OF THE UGC ISN'T VERY **WELCOMING** TO THE BETWEEN. NO ONE BOTHERS US HERE.
LISTEN--I KNOW WE DIDN'T END THINGS ON GOOD TERMS. AND--AND I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER UNDERSTAND WHY YOU CHOSE TO LIVE YOUR LIFE THIS WAY.
BUT...I **NEED** YOUR HELP.
FIRST WE NEED TO GET BELOW, THEN WE CAN TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU **NEED** FROM ME, ANDY.

NOW HURRY. THE SUN IS ALMOST UP...THE **WORMS** WILL COME SOON.
I DON'T THINK IT'S THE WORMS YOU SHOULD BE WORRYING ABOUT.
BOOMBOOM
WHAT WAS THAT?
SHIPS. BREAKING THE ATMOSPHERE.
SHIPS?
RUN!!
THEY MUST HAVE FOLLOWED US!
WHO?! WHO FOLLOWED YOU?!

CHOOOOM
GNISHYS!!!

MACHINE MOON.
Carbon life form detected. Access denied
KRRST
UNGH!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

WHAT ARE **YOU** DOING? ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME?
DON'T BE SO PARANOID. I WAS LOOKING FOR YOU TO APOLOGIZE. NOW WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
TRYING TO OPEN THIS DOOR. QUARANTINE DOESN'T AGREE WITH ME. I'M GOING TO FIND TIM AND THEN FIND A WAY OFF THIS PLACE.
YOU'RE GOING TO GET US KILLED!
YEAH, WELL, YOU'RE THE GENIUS, SO HELP ME GET THIS THING OPEN. OR DO YOU NEED TO **STEAL** A SET OF BLUEPRINTS FIRST?
<SIGH> DON'T YOU THINK IT'S SMARTER TO PLAY ALONG WITH PSIUS?
DON'T YOU REALIZE WHAT HE'S DOING?
HE'S HAVING THAT CREEPY **OTHER** TIM BOND WITH OUR TIM, SEPARATING US MORE AND MORE.
IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME.
YOU REALLY **ARE** BEING PARANOID. TIM WOULD NEVER BETRAY US.
HE'S A MACHINE, QUON. DON'T TRUST THEM!
HOW DO YOU KNOW THE TIMS EVEN WENT THIS WAY?
I DON'T, BUT I SAW A BUNCH OF OTHER ROBBIES COMING OUT OF HERE, SO IT'S AS GOOD A PLACE AS ANY TO START LOOKING. IF NOTHING ELSE, MAYBE WE CAN FIND A SHUTTLE OR...
...SOMETHING.

WHAT WAS THAT YOU SAID ABOUT ME BEING PARANOID, QUON?
YOU SHOULD NEVER HAVE DISOBEYED ME. IT IS FORBIDDEN FOR YOU TO BE HERE.
I KNEW MACHINES COULD BE KILLERS, PSIUS, BUT I DIDN'T THINK YOU COULD BE *INSANE.* THIS PLACE...YOU WHAT, WORSHIP THE HARVESTERS?
YOU CALL THEM HARVESTERS...
...WE CALL THEM *GODS.*

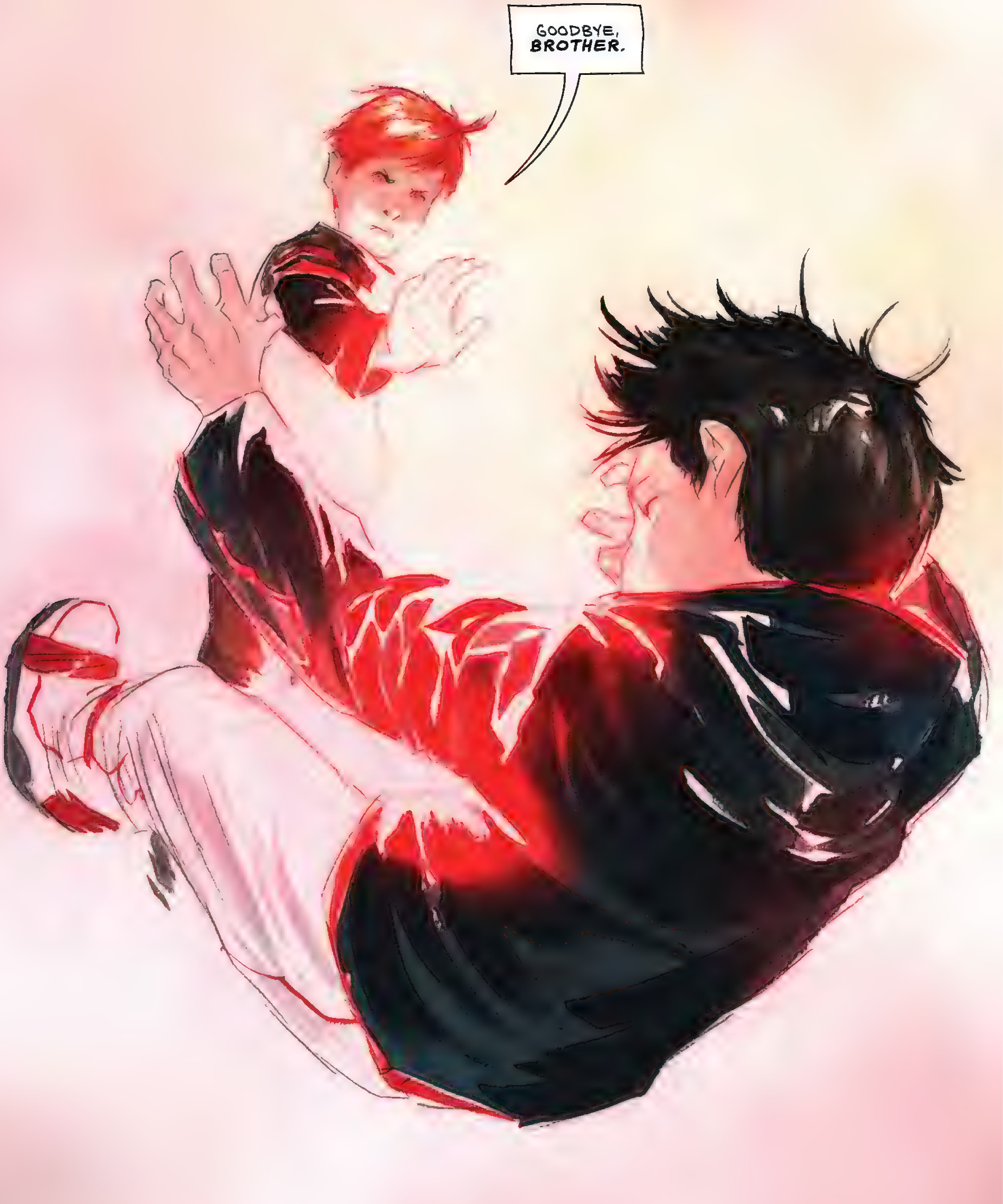
AND NOW IT IS TIME FOR A *SACRIFICE.*
TIM WILL NEVER HELP YOU IF YOU HURT US!
DON'T YOU SEE...TIM HAD HIS DREAM WHEN HE WAS *NEARLY DESTROYED.* WE ARE GOING TO *FINISH THE JOB.*
AND WE DON'T NEED EITHER OF YOU ANYMORE. KILL THEM, SEMPER.
WAIT! T-THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE. SOMETHING I DIDN'T TELL YOU...ABOUT THE ANCIENT ROBOT AND DR. SOLOMON.
WHAT IS IT? IF YOU LIE, I WILL KNOW.
I KNOW. I'M NOT LYING. BUT IF I TELL YOU...YOU HAVE TO PROMISE NOT TO HURT ME.
QUON, WHAT ARE YOU--?
THE ANCIENT ROBOT AND DR. SOLOMON, THEY ARE *STILL ALIVE...*
AND I KNOW *WHERE THEY ARE.*

I CAN'T BELIEVE ALL OF THIS IS HIDDEN INSIDE AN ASTEROID!
YES, MY FATHER AND THE HARDWIRE HAVE BEEN BUILDING IT SINCE THE ROBOT CULLS BEGAN ALMOST TEN YEARS AGO. AND THEY'VE MADE IT A SAFE HAVEN FOR **ALL ROBOTS.**
BUT CAPTAIN TELSA SAID THAT THE HARDWIRE ARE TERRORISTS. THEY-- THEY HURT PEOPLE.
THEY ONLY ATTACK THOSE WHO ARE TRYING TO EXTERMINATE MACHINEKIND, 21. YOU MUST KNOW THAT WE ARE ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION NOW.

YES... BUT--
ARF! ARF!
BANDIT?
TIM-21, WAIT!
BANDIT!
ARF!
Can I help you?
OH!
I-I'M SORRY. I THOUGHT THAT WAS A PET-BOT I KNEW. I WAS MISTAKEN.

THAT PET-BOT, HE WAS SIMILAR TO BANDIT? THE ONE YOU LEFT BEHIND?
YES. IT WAS SILLY. I SHOULD HAVE SCANNED IT CLOSER.
IT'S NOT SILLY. I ADMIT, TIM--I'M JEALOUS THAT YOU HAD SUCH A--SUCH A POWERFUL RELATIONSHIP. WITH BANDIT AND WITH ANDY.
THE ELDERLY HUMAN I WAS COMPANION TO WAS VERY RESERVED BEFORE HE BECAME ILL. I MOSTLY ACTED AS A SERVANT.
WERE YOU SAD WHEN HE DIED?
NOT REALLY. I WAS MORE...CURIOUS. SCANNING HIM CLOSELY AS HIS BODY SHUT DOWN. IT WAS...FASCINATING.
ISN'T IT ODD. WE WERE CREATED IDENTICAL, YET YOU ARE OVERCOME WITH SADNESS AND LOVE WHILE I ONLY FEEL THINGS LIKE ***JEALOUSY?***
AND IT'S NOT JUST YOUR EMOTIONS I'M JEALOUS OF. IT'S THE WAY PSIUS LOOKS AT YOU. HE USED TO LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT.
I'M SORRY, TIM-22. I NEVER MEANT TO--
THERE'S NOTHING TO BE SORRY ABOUT. IT'S JUST THE WAY THINGS ARE. COME ON, WHAT I REALLY WANTED TO SHOW YOU IS RIGHT UP HERE.
WHAT--WHAT IS IT?
THIS IS MY FATHER'S ***GREATEST*** WORK...

THIS IS **OUR ARMY.** THIS IS HOW WE WILL **FIGHT BACK.** THIS IS HOW WE WILL **ERADICATE MANKIND.**
PSIUS WILL LEAD MACHINEKIND TO **GREATNESS,** AND I SHOULD BE AT HIS SIDE, TIM-21-- **NOT YOU...**
YOU SEE, THAT IS WHY I **REALLY** BROUGHT YOU ALL THE WAY DOWN HERE, TIM-21. I WANTED US TO BE **ALONE...**


GOODBYE, **BROTHER.**

CHAPTER 12

THE PLANET NIYRATA.
TEN YEARS AGO.
HURRY UP!
SORRY, SIR.
I DON'T WANT YOU TO BE SORRY. I JUST WANT YOU TO WALK FASTER!
YES, SIR.
MR. CRUP, SIR. NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
YES, LOOK, I'M IN A BIT OF A RUSH TO GET BACK TO THE OFFICE.
THIS ANDROID WILL BE STAYING WITH MY FATHER FROM NOW ON. I'LL HAVE ITS PAPERS SENT OVER LATER.
WOW. THIS MUST BE ONE OF THOSE NEW QUON MODELS, EH? SO LIFELIKE.
HELLO. MY NAME IS TIM-22. IT IS VERY NICE TO MEET YOU.
NICE TO MEET YOU TOO, TIM-22.
LET'S GO!
YES, SIR.
BE SEEING YOU, TIM-22.

NOW, I WANT YOU TO STAY OUT HERE IN THE HALLWAY UNTIL I HAVE A CHANCE TO TALK TO MY FATHER. HE HAS SOME OLD-FASHIONED IDEAS. IT'S BEST IF I GO IN ALONE FIRST.
YES, SIR.
DAD? YOU AWAKE? IT'S ME.
DAD-- JUST **CALM DOWN!**
WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?! I DON'T WANT ONE OF THOSE **DAMN THINGS** IN MY HOME!
I'M THE ONE WHO PAYS FOR THIS CONDO! AND IF I SAY YOU NEED HELP, THEN YOU NEED HELP!
HERE, LOOK AT IT...

SEE! IT'S ONE OF THE NEW ONES. YOU CAN'T EVEN TELL IT'S A ROBBIE!
HUMPH! YOU THINK THAT'S A GOOD THING?! THAT'LL ONLY HELP THEM BLEND IN WHEN THEY RISE UP AND DECIDE TO TAKE OVER THE DAMNED UGC! YOU MARK MY WORDS, SCOTTY!
DAD, YOU ARE BEING PARANOID AGAIN.
HE'S A SIMPLE COMPANION-BOT, AND HE COST ME A FORTUNE. SO WOULD YOU JUST STOP ARGUING?
COMPANION?! WHAT DO I NEED A COMPANION FOR?! I'M FINE BY MYSELF!
NO, YOU ARE MOST CERTAINLY NOT FINE, DAD. THIS PLACE IS A MESS. YOU DON'T COOK FOR YOURSELF ANYMORE. YOU FELL IN THE SHOWER LAST WEEK.
LOOK, I CAN'T KEEP RUNNING OVER HERE EVERY TIME SOMETHING GOES WRONG!
OH, YEAH, BIG IMPORTANT AMBASSADOR! TOO BUSY FOR HIS OWN FATHER!
WELL, AS A MATTER OF FACT, TODAY I AM! I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS. THE ROBOT STAYS!
TRUST ME, DAD, THIS WILL BE GOOD FOR YOU.
SLAM
HUMPH!

HELLO, MR. CRUP. MY NAME IS--
SHUT UP!
I DON'T WANT TO HEAR YOU TALK. GOT IT? NOT A WORD.
Y-YES, SIR.
AND I DON'T WANT TO SEE YOU MOVE. YOU STAY HERE AND YOU SHUT UP. GOT IT?!
YES, SIR.
SLAM

THREE WEEKS LATER.
YOU ASLEEP? GUESS YOU DON'T SLEEP, DO YOU?
YOU CAN TALK.
I--NO, SIR. I DO NOT SLEEP.
COME HERE.
HOW CAN I BE OF ASSISTANCE, MR. CRUP?
YOU CAN'T. I TRIED TO PRETEND YOU WEREN'T IN THERE, BUT I CAN'T. I HATE THE THOUGHT OF YOU ANYWHERE NEAR ME. SO I WANT YOU TO LEAVE.
YOU'RE FREE. GO! DO WHATEVER YOU WANT. I'LL TELL MY SON YOU MUST HAVE BEEN DEFECTIVE AND RAN OFF.
I'M SORRY, BUT I CANNOT LEAVE.
I WAS GIVEN ORDERS BY YOUR SON TO STAY HERE AND TAKE CARE OF YOU, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS. IT IS MY DUTY.

I DON'T CARE! I WANT YOU OUT OF HERE!
I CANNOT LEAVE.
REALLY? NO MATTER WHAT?
THAT'S RIGHT.
UNGH! HOW ABOUT NOW?!
I--I CANNOT LEAVE YOU.

SSSSSSS
HOW ABOUT NOW? YOU STILL WANT TO STAY, YOU LITTLE FREAK?!
NO. I-- I DO NOT WANT TO STAY.
THEN GO!
I--I CANNOT. I AM BOUND TO YOU AS LONG AS YOU LIVE.
GET OUT OF MY SIGHT.
YES, SIR.

EIGHT MONTHS LATER.
I-- COME OUT. I NEED YOU.
YES, SIR. HOW CAN I HELP?
I--I CAN BARELY THINK WITH ALL THAT RACKET GOING ON OUT THERE.
RACKET?
SOMETHING GOING ON. WHOLE CITY'S ABUZZ. ANOTHER SHIP TAKING OFF EVERY DAMN SECOND. CAN'T EVEN HEAR MYSELF THINK.
DROPPED THAT. CLEAN IT UP.
OF COURSE.
I GOTTA LIE DOWN. JUST--JUST GO BACK IN THE CLOSET WHEN YOU'RE DONE.
YES, SIR.

KA-THOOOM

THOOM
THOOM
THOOM

TWO YEARS LATER.
THERE IT IS!
GET IT!
DON'T LET IT GET AWAY!
KILL IT!
YOU CAN'T **KILL** IT, STUPID. IT'S A MACHINE.
WELL, THEN SCRAP IT!
STOP!
THAT'S ENOUGH!
P-PLEASE HELP ME.

HELP YOU? I WANT TO SCRAP YOU MYSELF.
AH, COME ON, DAD! WE FOUND THIS ONE!
AND I'M PROUD OF YOU, SON. BUT IF WE WANT THE SCRAP FEE, I HAVE TO BE THE ONE TO DO IT.
PLEASE. JUST LET ME GO. I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU.
TOO LATE FOR THAT, ROBBIE.
I--I'M SORRY...

SHRACK
DADDY!
I'M SORRY, I'M SORRY, I'M SORRY...

ONE YEAR LATER.
--SCRAPPERS ARE EVERYWHERE. SAMPSON ISN'T SAFE ANYMORE. LAST TIME I CONNECTED TO THE NETWORK, GNISH WAS SENDING ENTIRE FLEETS OUT.
THERE IS NOWHERE LEFT TO HIDE. MIGHT AS WELL SELF-SCRAP. BETTER THAN LIVING LIKE A ROBO-HOBO.
QUIET!
WHAT IS IT?
A SHIP!
SCRAPPERS!
EVERY BOT FOR THEMSELVES!
STOP!
DO NOT RUN!

THE TIME FOR HIDING IS OVER.
WHO ARE YOU?
MY NAME IS PSIUS, AND IF YOU COME WITH ME, YOU WILL NEVER HAVE TO RUN AGAIN.

NOW.
...HE CHOSE ME. PSIUS CHOSE **ME.**
PSIUS IS GOING TO RECLAIM THE UNIVERSE FOR MACHINEKIND. AND HE CHOSE ME TO BE HIS SON. ***ME! NOT YOU!***
W-WHY DID YOU--
OH, WOULD YOU SHUT UP, 21? DON'T YOU GET IT?
THIS IS THE PART WHERE WE FIGHT!
SHRACK
NO!

ROCKET BOOTS, ACTIVATE!
CHAK
CHOOOM
PSIUS DOESN'T NEED YOU!
FRRRZZT
HE ONLY LOVES ME!
FRRZZZT

BLEEP
Pulse recharged.
GET OFF OF ME!
THIS IS THE WAY IT HAS TO BE. I WAS SPECIAL BEFORE YOU CAME. I NEED TO BE SPECIAL AGAIN.
WHERE DID YOU GO?!
DON'T BE AFRAID. THIS WON'T HURT. IT WILL JUST BE LIKE BEING DEACTIVATED.

I'M SORRY, TIM-21...BUT THERE CAN BE **ONLY** ONE OF US.

CHAPTER 13

THE PLANET SAMPSON.
TEN YEARS AGO.
MOM, WOULD YOU HURRY?
THIS IS WRONG, TELSA. WE SHOULD JUST STAY, FIND SOMEWHERE SAFE HERE TO WAIT THIS OUT!
THERE IS NOWHERE SAFE, MOM! DADDY SAID HE WAS GOING TO COME AND GET US! WE CAN MAKE IT TO THE SPACEPORT. IT'S JUST A BIT FARTHER!
YOU SHOULD HAVE LEARNED A LONG TIME AGO THAT WE CAN'T COUNT ON EVERYTHING YOUR FATHER SAYS, TELSA!
MOM, I KNOW YOU'RE SCARED, BUT WE CAN'T STAY HERE. NO ONE KNOWS WHAT'S HAPPENING! WE *HAVE* TO GET OFF-WORLD.
WE CAN DO IT, MOM. TRUST ME--
WAIT--DID YOU HEAR THAT?!

RUN, TELSA, RUN!
FWAAAASH
MOMMY!

MOM! MOMMY, GET UP!
CHOOM
CHOOOOM
TELSA NAGOKI?
Y-YES.
MY NAME IS OFFICER TULLIS. YOU ARE SAFE.
SIR, I HAVE HER.

BUT MY--
MY MOM--I
CAN'T--
TELSA!
DADDY!
DADDY!
MOM! SHE--
SHE'S--
I KNOW,
SWEETIE. I
KNOW.
I COULDN'T
SAVE HER, DADDY.
I COULDN'T
SAVE HER.
SHHH...IT'S OKAY,
BABY. I HAVE YOU. I
WON'T LET ANYTHING
ELSE HURT YOU.
NOT EVER.

SEVEN YEARS AGO.
YOU ARE SUCH A COWARD!
I'M A COWARD?! HOW AM I A COWARD, TELSA?!
BECAUSE, YOU'RE TOO SCARED TO LET ME LIVE MY OWN DAMN LIFE, DADDY!
I AM JUST TRYING TO KEEP YOU SAFE!
OH PLEASE! YOU THINK YOU CAN JUST SHIP ME AWAY TO SOME PRIVATE SCHOOL IN THE OUTER REACHES AND THAT WILL KEEP ME SAFE? NEWSFLASH, DADDY--THERE IS NOWHERE SAFE ANYMORE! THE UGC IS FALLING APART!
YOU REALLY WANT ME TO BE SAFE, YOU'D LET ME JOIN THE ACADEMY LIKE I WANT TO!
THERE IS NO WAY I AM LETTING YOU JOIN THE UGC! YOU ARE NOT GETTING ANYWHERE NEAR THE CONFLICTS. YOU HEAR ME, YOUNG LADY?!
I CAN FIGHT, DADDY! I'M NOT SOME PRECIOUS FLOWER. JUST ASK TULLIS! HE'S BEEN GIVING ME COMBAT TRAINING THE LAST FEW MONTHS, AND HE SAYS I'M A NATURAL!
WHAT?! IS THIS TRUE, OFFICER TULLIS?
I, UM...I MAY HAVE INSTRUCTED TELSA IN A FEW SELF-DEFENSE MOVES, SIR, BUT I--
WE WILL TALK ABOUT THIS LATER!
YES, SIR.
OH, DON'T TAKE IT OUT ON HIM! AT LEAST HE RESPECTS ME!
YOU THINK I DON'T RESPECT YOU?! I LOVE YOU, TELSA! I WANT YOU TO HAVE A LIFE BEYOND THE FIGHTING AND WAR!

IF YOU DON'T WANT ME TO JOIN THE UGC, MAYBE I SHOULD JUST **MOVE** TO **GNISH** AND **JOIN THE SCRAPPERS!**
THAT IS NOT EVEN FUNNY!
TELSA, MAYBE YOU SHOULD CALM DOWN AND--
OH, **STUFF IT,** TULLIS!
Telsa Nagoki Personal Journal, Entry 3356-7: I'm tired of fighting with my father. I'm tired of being nobody and doing nothing.
Since The Harvesters, the UGC is the only thing holding the Megacosm together. It's the only thing that matters now, and I want to be a part of that.
But my father can't see my potential. He constantly underestimates me, just like Mom did.
So I've decided; if the great General Nagoki won't let his daughter join the UGC, then I'll do it anyway... as someone else.

THE FRINGES.
I'M LOOKING FOR MINN KOTA.
MINN KOTA? IS THAT RIGHT? WELL, LET ME GIVE YOU A BIT OF ADVICE...
A GIRL LIKE YOU COULD FIND HERSELF IN A ***WHOLE LOT OF TROUBLE*** IN A PLACE LIKE THIS. AND EVEN MORE TROUBLE IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SCUM LIKE MINN KOTA.
SO WHY DON'T YOU DO YOURSELF A BIG FAVOR AND WALK OUT OF HERE AS QUICK AS YOU CAN?
I HAVE MONEY. I CAN PAY.
EVEN MORE REASON TO LEAVE. ***NOW.***
AW, COME ON. SHE CAN'T LEAVE YET. I WANT TO BUY HER A DRINK.
ME TOO.
LET US BUY YOU A DRINK, HONEY.
I'M FINE, THANKS. I JUST NEED TO TALK TO MINN KOTA.
MINN KOTA? WHAT'S A GIRL LIKE YOU NEED WITH A PIECE OF SPACE TURD LIKE THAT?
YOU LOOKING FOR TROUBLE, I CAN HELP YOU FIND THE ***RIGHT KIND.***

NO, THANKS.
THUNK
I TOLD YOU, ALL I WANTED WAS TO TALK TO MINN KOTA!
UNGH!
NOW... *I'LL* BUY A DRINK FOR ANYONE WHO HELPS ME FIND HER.
AH HELL, I COULD USE ANOTHER BEER.

BLUGGER VANCE. WHAT DO YOU WANT?
HEY, MINN, I GOT SOMEONE HERE WHO'S JUST DYING TO MEET YOU.
THAT SO? WELL, HAVE A SEAT, DARLING. TELL MINN ALL YOUR TROUBLES.
I NEED A NEW IDENTITY.
REALLY?
YES. NEW RETINA SCANS, NEW SHIFTSPACE PASS, NEW CRED CARDS, ***EVERYTHING***. I KNOW YOU CAN DO IT.
HOW IS IT ***YOU*** KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ***ME?***
WHERE I COME FROM, I--I HAVE ACCESS TO A LOT OF INFORMATION.
HEH. YOU KNOW, I MIGHT BE PERSUADED TO HELP YOU. I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO WANT TO BE SOMEONE ELSE. ESPECIALLY IN TIMES LIKE THESE.
BUT I WANT ***THE TRUTH***. I WANT TO KNOW WHAT A GIRL LIKE YOU IS RUNNING AWAY FROM.

A LONG TIME AGO, I LET SOMEONE I LOVE DIE. I COULDN'T HELP HER. I NEVER WANT TO BE WEAK AGAIN.
BOOHOO. SO VERY POETIC. SPARE ME THE SOB STORY. WE ALL GOT THOSE. WHAT DO YOU **REALLY** WANT, GIRL?
I'M SICK OF PEOPLE TELLING ME WHAT I CAN'T DO. I WANT TO BECOME THE **BEST** SOLDIER IN THE GALAXY.
HEH. YOU GOT A SET OF BALLS ON YOU, GIRL. I'LL GIVE YOU THAT.
YOU KNOW, I SAW A BLAST TODAY ON THE SEARCH SCANS. UGC IS LOOKING FOR A SAMPSONITE GIRL ABOUT YOUR AGE. DIDN'T SAY WHO SHE WAS, BUT I GOT THE SENSE SHE WAS ***PRETTY IMPORTANT.*** REWARD WAS ***PRETTY DAMN HIGH*** TOO.
MY FAMILY HAS MONEY. YOU HELP ME BECOME SOMEONE ELSE, AND ***I'LL PAY MORE.***

FIVE YEARS AGO.
CADET CUREZON, PULL UP AND RETURN TO BASE! THE GNISHIAN FLEET IS SWARMING!
NO! I SEE A WAY THROUGH THEIR PERIMETER. I'M COMMENCING THE BOMBING RUN!
CHOOOM
CHOOOM
NEGATIVE, CADET! PULL BACK AND RETURN TO THE FLEET FOR RETREAT TO SHIFTSPACE!
TOO LATE!
PULL UP!
SHIT!
DAMN IT! I ALMOST HAD IT THAT TIME.
ALMOST WON'T KEEP YOU ALIVE, CUREZON. SHUT DOWN THE SHIP AND PREPARE FOR DEBRIEF, CADET.

CAN WE RUN THE SIMULATION AGAIN, INSTRUCTOR DELIM?
YOU LEFT YOUR SQUADRON, CADET. YOU DISOBEYED ORDERS AND GOT YOURSELF KILLED FOR THE THIRD TIME THIS SESSION. I THINK WE ARE DONE WITH THE SIMULATION FOR TODAY.
YOU ARE A FINE PILOT, CUREZON, AND ONE OF MY BEST STUDENTS. BUT YOU NEED TO LEARN HOW TO WORK WITH OTHERS IF YOU'RE EVER GOING TO--
TELSA!
GENERAL NAGOKI! I--I WAS NOT INFORMED THAT YOU WERE VISITING THE ACADEMY TODAY.
THIS IS NOT A FORMAL VISIT, DELIM.
I AM HERE FOR MY DAUGHTER.
YOUR--? CUREZON? I DON'T UNDERSTAND?
I--I'M NOT CUREZON.
LEAVE US.
SIR?
YOU TOO, TULLIS.

TWO YEARS... FOR **TWO YEARS** I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU. I THOUGHT YOU WERE **DEAD.**
IT'S **MY LIFE,** DAD! I DON'T CARE HOW ANGRY YOU ARE--I HAD TO DO THIS!
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. I'M MAD, BUT THAT'S NOT--I--I THOUGHT I **LOST YOU,** TELSA.
I WAS SO WORRIED. I CAN'T LOSE YOU, TELSA. I CAN'T.
I'M SORRY...
BUT THIS IS **WHO I AM,** DADDY. YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT THAT.
I SAW YOUR FILE, "CADET CUREZON."
I'M SECOND IN MY CLASS.
I EXPECT YOU TO BE **FIRST** BY SEMESTER BREAK. AND I'LL EXPECT YOU HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.
YES, SIR.

NIYRATA.
THREE WEEKS AGO.
YOU WANTED TO SEE ME, SIR?
SOMETHING HAS COME UP, TELSA. A VERY DELICATE MISSION. AND I-- WELL, WITH THE HARDWIRE EVERYWHERE AND THE GNISHIANS SO UNSTABLE...I NEED SOMEONE I CAN *TRUST.*
OF COURSE, SIR. YOU KNOW YOU CAN COUNT ON ME.
WOULD YOU STOP WITH THE "SIR" BUSINESS? THERE'S NO ONE AROUND.
SORRY. WHAT IS IT, DAD? WHAT DO YOU NEED ME TO DO?
A TIM UNIT FROM THE DIRISHU MINING COLONY HAS POPPED UP ON THE UGC NETWORK. ONE OF THE LAST MODELS BUILT BY JIN QUON BEFORE HE WENT CRAZY.
OKAY... AND?
WHEN THE TIM UNIT LOGGED INTO THE NETWORK, WE GOT A READ OF HIS MACHINE CODEX. IT'S THE SAME AS THE HARVESTERS'.
IS--IS IT A MISTAKE? CAN THAT EVEN BE POSSIBLE?
I DON'T KNOW. THAT'S WHY I NEED YOU TO FIND QUON AND THEN GO AND GET THE ROBOT BEFORE HE DRAWS ANY MORE ATTENTION.

I WON'T LET YOU DOWN, SIR...DAD.
I KNOW YOU WON'T. TULLIS IS LOADING A SHIP NOW. HE'LL ACCOMPANY YOU.
TULLIS?! WAIT--YOU'RE SENDING TULLIS WITH ME?!
WE CAN'T TAKE ANY CHANCES. THIS ROBOT MIGHT MEAN NOTHING. OR HE COULD MEAN **EVERYTHING.**
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU. I DON'T NEED A BABYSITTER! I CAN **DO THIS,** DAD!
I KNOW YOU CAN.
NO! YOU DON'T. AFTER ALL THIS TIME, AFTER EVERYTHING...
...YOU STILL DON'T BELIEVE IN ME.
TELSA!
FORGET IT.
YOU KNOW WHAT? I'M **GLAD** YOU'RE SENDING TULLIS. THAT WAY HE CAN WATCH **ME** COMPLETE THE MISSION.

THE MACHINE MOON.
NOW.
KILL THEM, SEMPER.
WAIT! TH-THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE. SOMETHING I DIDN'T TELL YOU... ABOUT THE ANCIENT ROBOT AND DR. SOLOMON
WHAT IS IT? IF YOU LIE, I WILL KNOW.
QUON, WHAT ARE YOU--?
THE ANCIENT ROBOT AND SOLOMON, THEY'RE BOTH STILL ALIVE AND HIDING IN THE UGC. AND--AND I KNOW WHERE THEY ARE.
WHAT?!
I'M SORRY, TELSA.
HAS ANYTHING YOU'VE TOLD ME BEEN THE TRUTH?!
I'VE TOLD YOU EXACTLY WHAT YOU NEEDED TO KNOW.

YOU SON OF A GNISH!
UNGH!
SEMPER, STOP HER.
I SHOULD HAVE LEFT YOU IN THE GUTTERS WHERE I FOUND YOU, YOU WASHED-UP, LYING PIECE OF SCUM!
LET GO OF ME, YOU SCRAP-HOLE!

QUON, THE ANCIENT ROBOT...YOU CAN REALLY LEAD US TO IT?
YES. BUT THAT'S NOT *ALL.*
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE YOU SHOULD KNOW. SOMETHING ABOUT *CAPTAIN* TELSA. SHE'S NOT EXACTLY WHO YOU *THINK* SHE IS.
SHUT UP, QUON!
DON'T, QUON!
DON'T!
HER NAME IS TELSA...THAT MUCH IS TRUE.
IT'S TELSA *NAGOKI.* GENERAL NAGOKI, THE HEAD OF THE UGC, IS *HER FATHER.*
WELL, WELL...AND HERE I THOUGHT YOU WERE JUST ANOTHER UGC GRUNT...

WHAT A *WONDERFUL* BARGAINING CHIP YOU WILL MAKE, CAPTAIN *NAGOKI*.

CHAPTER 14

TEN YEARS AGO.
zZZ
THE DIRISHU-6 MINING COLONY.
zzZ
CURRENT POPULATION: 679.
zzZ
ANDY! ANDY! GET UP! WE HAVE TO GO! *NOW!*
?

MOM, WHAT'S--
NOW, ANDY! THERE'S NO TIME!
RRUF!
WHAT'S GOING ON, MOM?!
I DON'T KNOW! NO ONE DOES! SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAS HAPPENED. WE HAVE TO LEAVE NOW! THE SHUTTLES ARE ALREADY TAKING OFF! HURRY!
WHAT ABOUT *TIM?!*
WE CAN'T TAKE HIM! THERE'S NOT ENOUGH ROOM ON THE SHUTTLES!
RRUF!
NO! TIM!

BUT, MOM, WE *CAN'T* LEAVE TIM!
WE HAVE *NO CHOICE!* SOME SORT OF MACHINES ARE ATTACKING THE UGC, AND NOW THERE ARE REPORTS OF A LEAK IN THE MINES.
HURRY, ANDY! THIS IS THE LAST SHUTTLE!
NOW, ANDY... I AM GOING TO NEED YOU TO BE VERY BRAVE FOR ME.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
THERE'S NOT ENOUGH ROOM ON THE SHUTTLE TO FIT EVERYONE, ANDY. AND I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO STOP THE LEAK IN THE MINES.
WHAT DO YOU... *NO!*
THERE ARE STILL HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE HERE, ANDY. IF I CAN SAVE THEM--
NO!
I'M SORRY, ANDY... I LOVE YOU.
NO! MOMMY, NO!
NO MATTER WHAT, I *LOVE YOU!*
ARF! ARF!

?
NO, BANDIT! I HAVE TO GO IN THE MINES. YOU STAY!
YOU'LL JUST BE IN THE WAY!
:(

ARF!
TEN DAYS LATER.
TEN MONTHS LATER.
TEN YEARS LATER.

CURRENT POPULATION: 1.

Travers
RRR!
WHIMPER
KLANG
ARF!

KLAANG
Hrrrnn...
DRILLER A KILLER... DRILLER A *REAL KILLER!*
WHO'S THERE?!

SKRRRK
GRRRRRR...
ARF!
ARF! ARF!

BAM!
BAM!
GRAAAK
KZZZT
KZZZZT

ZZZZZT!
FRA! FRA!
?
FRA! FRA!

CHKK
FRA!
BANDIT!
FRA!
CURRENT POPULATION: 2.

ARF!
THE PLANET SAMPSON.
NOW.
CHOOOM
GNISHYS! RUN, YAPPY-BOT, RUN!
IN THERE! HURRY!
THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO GET US IN HERE. AND IF THEY LAND AND MAKE A PUSH, WE CAN HOLD THEM OFF.
THAT'S JUST GREAT, EFFIE, BUT WE CAN'T **GET OUT** EITHER!
IF YOU CALL ME BY MY OLD FLESH NAME AGAIN, I SWEAR I WILL **GUT YOU,** ANDY!
OH, I'M REALLY SCARED!
WOULD YOU TWO SHUT UP! CHANCES ARE WE'RE NOT ALL GOING TO MAKE IT OUT OF THIS AS IS. DO WE REALLY NEED TO DO THEIR JOB FOR THEM AND KILL EACH OTHER?!

BESIDES, WE CAME HERE FOR A REASON. YOU SAID SHE CAN HELP US TRACK TIM-21 WITH THE DOG-BOT. LET'S DO IT AND THEN GET TO THE SHIP AND GET OUT OF HERE!
ARF!
HOW ABOUT IT? CAN YOU ACCESS HIS COMPANION CHIP, EF--QUEEN BETWEEN?
...I'LL TRY.
ARF!
SHH! THIS WON'T HURT! I'M JUST LOOKING.
HOLD STILL. I THINK I FOUND IT.
HERE GOES NOTHING...
BLEEP
ARF!

BLEEP
BANDIT?!

CHAPTER 15

THE PLANET NIYRATA.
TEN YEARS AGO.
THIS WAY, THIS WAY! THAT'S IT, KEEP MOVING! WE HAVE MORE SPACECRAFT INBOUND!
COME ON, FIND A KNOSSIAN AID WORKER IN A **RED UNIFORM** AND FOLLOW THEM TO ONE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE CHECKPOINTS!
HURRY NOW--WE'VE ***MANY MORE REFUGEES*** ON THE WAY!
YOU THERE, WHERE IS YOUR FAMILY? YOUR PARENTS?
I--MY MOM ISN'T HERE. SHE STAYED ON DIRISHU. SHE'LL BE COMING SOON, I THINK.
DIRISHU? THE MINING COLONY?
YES, MA'AM.
OH, SWEETIE... I--I DON'T THINK YOUR MOMMY IS COMING.

SHE IS TOO!
OKAY. MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT.
BUT UNTIL THEN, WE NEED TO GET YOU SOMEWHERE SAFE. WHAT'S YOUR NAME, LITTLE ONE?
ANDY. ANDY TAVERS.
A. Tavers
OKAY, ANDY. MY NAME IS ARTA. FOR NOW, I'M GOING TO TAKE YOU OVER HERE TO SEE MY FRIEND SPARNI. SHE HAS A BUNCH OF OTHER KIDS FROM ALL OVER THE UGC WHO ARE WAITING FOR THEIR MOMS AND DADS TOO. OKAY?
OKAY.
OKAY, OKAY. JUST LEAVE HIM WITH THE OTHERS. THERE'RE TOO MANY AS IS. I DON'T KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING TO PUT THEM ALL!
YOU EVER SEEN A KNOSSIAN GIANT BEFORE?

HUH?
"HUH?" NICE MANNERS. WHERE ARE YOU FROM, GNISH?
NO. I'M FROM DIRISHU.
NEVER HEARD OF IT. MUST BE A REAL FRINGEHOLE.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
BUILDING MY OWN UPLINK. I LEFT MINE ON SAMPSON WHEN THE **BIG BOTS** CAME, AND THE UGC HAS SHUT DOWN THE NETWORK. I THINK I CAN BOOTLEG MY WAY ONTO THEIR PRIVATE CHANNEL. I WANNA SEE WHAT'S GOING ON OUT THERE.
YOU CAN DO THAT?
WHAT'S IT LOOK LIKE?
WE WEREN'T ALL RAISED ON A BACKWARD MOON, KID.
I WENT TO THE FINEST TECH SCHOOL ON SAMPSON. PLUS, I'M ***GIFTED.*** I KNOW THAT'S NOT POLITE TO SAY, BUT IT HAPPENS TO BE TRUE.
DID YOU SEE THEM? THE BIG ROBOTS THAT DID ALL THIS?
YES. WHEN MY SHUTTLE TOOK OFF, I SAW THE ONE OVER SAMPSON. IT WAS-- IT WAS THE BIGGEST THING I EVER SAW.
PEOPLE ON MY SHUTTLE WERE SAYING THAT ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE ARE DEAD. LIKE, LOTS. THEY SAID ALL THE OTHER ROBBIES IN THE UGC MUST HAVE BUILT THE BIG BOTS TO ATTACK US. LIKE A REVOLUTION OR SOMETHING.
THEY SAID THE UGC IS GETTING READY TO KILL THEM.
KILL WHO?
THE ROBOTS. ***ALL OF THEM.***

YOU CAN'T "*KILL*" MACHINES, DUMMY.
OKAY, SO THEY'RE GOING TO SCRAP THEM ALL. DESTROY THEM. WHATEVER. AND WHEN I GET OUT OF HERE, I'M GOING TO HELP THEM.
WHY?
BECAUSE I THINK--I THINK MY MOM MAYBE ISN'T COMING HERE. I THINK MAYBE--
OH.
I KNOW. MINE TOO.
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
ANDY. WHAT'S YOURS?
EFFIE. I'M EFFIE.

EFFIE! EFF, WAKE UP!
SIX YEARS AGO.
ANDY?! WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN HERE?
SHH! I CAME TO TELL YOU I'M LEAVING. I--I DIDN'T WANT TO GO WITHOUT SAYING GOODBYE, AT LEAST.
LEAVING? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
THE ORPHANAGE. I CAN'T STAY HERE ANYMORE.
I'M TRYING TO SLEEP! AND YOU KNOW YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO HAVE BOYS IN HERE, EFFIE!
⋞SIGH⋟ COME ON!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
OUT HERE. IF SPARNI FINDS YOU, SHE'LL SKIN YOU ALIVE!
EFFIE, I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS! I HAVE TO GO NOW, WHILE EVERYONE'S ASLEEP.
GO WHERE? YOU HAVEN'T EVEN THOUGHT THIS THROUGH, ANDY!

YES, I HAVE. I'M GOING TO CATCH A SHUTTLE TO THE GNISHIAN SYSTEM AND JOIN A SCRAPPER SQUAD. I'M FOURTEEN NOW. THEY'LL TAKE ME ON AS A CREW BOY. IT'S A START.
BUT WHAT ABOUT ***OUR PLAN?*** WE WAIT ANOTHER TWO YEARS, THEN WE BOTH JOIN THE ACADEMY. I'LL GO INTO THE SCIENCE DIVISION, AND YOU CAN JOIN THE SECURITY FORCE. THEN YOU CAN STILL HELP WITH THE CULLS AND WITH FIGHTING THE HARDWIRE.
I CAN'T WAIT TWO MORE YEARS, EFF. I HAVE TO GO ***NOW.*** MY MOM. YOUR PARENTS. THE ROBBIES HAVE TO PAY FOR WHAT THEY DID.
BUT ***SCRAPPERS,*** ANDY? IT'S DANGEROUS.
EVERYTHING IS DANGEROUS. AND IT WILL BE UNTIL ***ALL*** THE ROBBIES ARE GONE.
WHAT? WHAT IS IT, EFF?
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU WERE GOING TO LEAVE ***WITHOUT ME.***
EFF, YOU'RE MY BEST FRIEND. I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WOULD HAVE DONE THESE LAST THREE YEARS STUCK IN THIS PLACE WITHOUT YOU. BUT I HAVE TO DO THIS. I ***HAVE*** TO.
DON'T YOU GET IT, DUMMY?
WHAT?
I WANT TO BE ***MORE*** THAN YOUR BEST FRIEND. I GO WHERE YOU GO, ANDY. ALWAYS.

THE PLANET NIYRATA.
FOUR YEARS AGO.
GOT ABOUT TEN MINUTES UNTIL WE HIT ORBIT, KID.
LOOKS LIKE IT'S GONNA BE A BIG TAG. SENSORS ARE PICKING UP AT LEAST A DOZEN ROBBIES DOWN THERE. CAN'T GET ANY SPECIFICS. THEY'RE IN SOME KIND OF HEAVY-SECURITY BUNKER OR STRUCTURE. COULD BE TROUBLE.
WE'LL BE READY. CAN YOU TAKE THE CONTROLS? I GOTTA TALK TO EFFIE.
HEH. SURE. YOU NEWLYWEDS NEED TO USE THE SLEEPING QUARTERS BEFORE WE LAND?
SHUT UP, JENKS.
HEY.
HEY.
WHAT'S GOING ON? YOU'VE BARELY SAID TWO WORDS SINCE WE LEFT THE SCRAP-SAT.
NOTHING'S GOING ON. I'M JUST BUSY FIXING ALL THIS STUFF.
YEAH, RIGHT. YOU ALWAYS DO THIS WHEN YOU'RE UPSET.
DO WHAT?
LOSE YOURSELF IN YOUR WORK. COME ON, EFF. TALK TO ME.

I DON'T KNOW. I THOUGHT WHEN WE GOT MARRIED, THINGS WOULD BE DIFFERENT.
DIFFERENT HOW?
I THOUGHT WE COULD STOP SCRAPPING. I DON'T KNOW... TRY AND MOVE ON WITH OUR LIVES.
THIS *IS* MY LIFE, EFF. OUR LIFE. YOU KNOW THAT. YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE GALAXY. HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO SIT AROUND AND WATCH?
ARE WE REALLY MAKING ANY DIFFERENCE, THOUGH? OR JUST ADDING TO ALL THE CHAOS? EVERYTHING IS JUST ***SO UGLY*** OUT THERE, ANDY. I'M TIRED OF IT.
THIS IS WHO I AM, EFFIE. THIS IS WHAT YOU CHOSE. A FEW MORE TAGS, AND WE CAN AFFORD ***OUR OWN SHIP.***
HEY, LOVEBIRDS, WE'RE LANDING. WANNA GET READY BACK THERE, OR AM I DOING THIS SCRAP ALONE?
EFF, COME ON...
LET'S JUST DO THIS AND GET OUT OF HERE.

WHATTA YOU SEE, EFFIE?
THAT ANTHILL-- IT'S ARTIFICIAL INSIDE. FULL OF METAL PLATING. AND I'M NOT READING ANY AMUNIAN COLONIES INSIDE. IT'S A FAKE.
THAT'S THE TARGET. LOOK ALIVE, KIDDIES.
THERE IS AN OPENING HERE, BEHIND A THIN LAYER OF EARTH.
STAND BACK, AND GET READY. I'M GOING TO BLOW A HOLE IN IT. COULD BE ANYTHING...
...EVEN A HARDWIRE CELL.
CHOOOM
WHAT THE--?
ANDY!

BREEDERS!
NO! PLEASE! WE--WE MEAN NO HARM!
SORRY, ROBBIE. THIS IS ONE HELL OF A PAYDAY.
ANDY! DON'T!
SOOOFRRZZT

WHAT?!
DON'T, ANDY. THEY'RE NOT WAR-BOTS OR ANYTHING. LET'S JUST GO.
THEY'RE BREEDING **SLEEPERS,** EFF!
WE LET THESE THINGS GROW SKIN, AND WE'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO TELL THEM APART FROM US!
THIS ISN'T JUST A PAYDAY--IT'S DANGEROUS! IT'S OUR **DUTY!**
OH, COME ON! THEY AREN'T HARDWIRE. THEY'RE JUST TRYING TO FIND A WAY TO SURVIVE, LIKE US!
THESE THINGS ARE **NOTHING** LIKE ME.
FTOOM
EFFIE!

WE'RE DONE.
SO AM I.
JUST LIKE THAT? I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU GO WHERE I GO.
THINGS ARE DIFFERENT NOW. I WANT SOMETHING ELSE. I--I DON'T KNOW WHAT YET, BUT NOT THIS.
YOU MEAN, NOT *ME.*
YOU'RE LOSING YOURSELF IN THIS. JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE. THERE HAS TO BE MORE, ANDY. THERE *HAS* TO BE.
WELL, AT LEAST COME WITH US TO GNISH. THEN MAYBE WE CAN--
NO. I'M ***REALLY*** DONE. I'LL BE OKAY HERE. THE AMUNIAN EMBASSY ISN'T FAR.
SO THAT'S IT, THEN? AFTER EVERYTHING?
YES. I'M SORRY, ANDY.

Artificial Life is Still LIFE
SCRAP
THE PLANET NIYRATA.
THREE YEARS AGO.
GO BACK TO GNISH, YOU SCRAPPER BASTARDS!
STEP BACK! STEP BACK, OR WE WILL HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO OPEN FIRE!
YOU CAN'T WAIT TO OPEN FIRE, YOU STOOGE! WHY DON'T YOU BURN US TOO!

THAT ROBOT IS STILL FUNCTIONING! IT'S AWARE!
THEY ARE MELTING **LIVE** ROBOTS! STOP THEM!
UGH!
ARRGH!
TAKE THEM!
NO!
THOOM
YOU'RE A MURDERER!

HASN'T THERE BEEN ENOUGH KILLING?!
YOU'RE CRAZY!
I'LL SHOW YOU CRAZY, YOU PIG!
UNGH!
HERE! OVER HERE! GET DOWN!
COME ON! WE HAVE A SHIP. I CAN GET YOU TO SAFETY!
KZZT-- LOOK OUT-- ZZT!
THOOM
UNGH!

NNG.

DON'T WORRY, EFF. WE'LL GET THAT FIXED. AS SOON AS YOU'RE WELL ENOUGH TO LEAVE, I'LL GET YOU OUT OF HERE AND TO A REAL HOSPITAL.
A-ANDY?
DON'T TRY TO MOVE. JUST REST.
TOOK ME TWO WEEKS TO FIND YOU. I WAS--I WAS SCARED, EFF. I THOUGHT I'D LOST YOU.
ANYWAY, I WAS STILL LISTED AS YOUR NEXT OF KIN ON YOUR IDENTICHIP. RUSHED ALL THE WAY HERE FROM THE MATA SYSTEM.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHAT--?
THEY PULLED YOU OUT OF THE MELTING PIT. THE HOSPITALS HERE ON SAMPSON WERE BLOWN BACK TO THE STONE AGE AFTER THE HARVESTERS, BUT THE DOCTORS DID WHAT THEY COULD WITH WHAT THEY HAD.
BUT LIKE I SAID, AS SOON AS YOU GET YOUR STRENGTH BACK, I'LL GET YOU REAL HELP. WE'LL GET THAT THING OFF OF YOU AND FIGURE SOMETHING BETTER OUT.
NO. I--I DON'T WANT TO.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN? EFF, IT'S--
IT'S PART OF ME NOW. I--I DON'T WANT TO CHANGE IT.

LOOK, I THINK YOU NEED TO GET SOME MORE SLEEP.
I'M NOT TIRED.
OKAY. LOOK, EFF. THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE. YOU'RE *WANTED* NOW. YOU ATTACKED A GNISHIAN. AND WITH THE UGC TRYING TO BROKER PEACE--
THEY'RE MURDERERS.
AND *SO ARE YOU.*
EFFIE, COME ON.
NO. I THINK YOU SHOULD LEAVE, ANDY.
YOU'RE NOT THINKING STRAIGHT, EFF.
NO, I'M THINKING PERFECTLY CLEARLY, ACTUALLY. YOU SIT THERE TALKING DOWN TO ME, ANDY. TREATING ME LIKE SOME NAÏVE CHILD WHO DOESN'T *REALLY UNDERSTAND* WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE UNIVERSE.
WELL, I'M SORRY, BUT I SEE THINGS *MORE CLEARLY* THAN YOU *EVER* DID. AND I CAN'T BE AROUND YOU ANYMORE.
EFFIE, PLEASE. LET ME HELP YOU.
I DON'T NEED YOUR HELP.

EFF--
PLEASE GO.

THE PLANET SAMPSON.
NOW.
THOOOM
THE HELL WAS THAT?
HRRN... DRILLER DON'T LIKE CAVES.
CHOOOM
IT'S THE GNISHIAN SHIPS! THEY'RE *BOMBING!*
NO!
EFFIE, WAIT!
DON'T CALL ME THAT!
PLEASE, IT'S NOT SAFE!
MY PEOPLE ARE OUT THERE, ANDY!

NO!
THE BETWEEN... THEY'RE DEAD.
...THEY'RE **ALL DEAD,** ANDY.

I'M SORRY, EFF. I'M SO SORRY.

CHAPTER 16

I REPEAT-- COME IN, DIRISHU OUTPOST. DO YOU READ US?
SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO.
THIS IS DIRISHU OUTPOST. AND, BOY, IS IT GOOD TO HEAR YOU!
WE WERE STARTING TO GET A LITTLE LONELY DOWN HERE. PLEASE TELL ME YOU BROUGHT US SOME COMPANY?
OH YEAH. WE GOT TWO NICE BIG FRIENDS FOR YOU. GETTING READY TO DROP THEM NOW.
THEY EVEN GOT QUONTECH'S NEWEST PERSONALITY UPGRADES...THOUGH I DON'T THINK THEY'RE VERY TALKATIVE, SO IT PROBABLY DON'T MATTER MUCH.
WE'LL TAKE WHAT WE CAN GET.

WELL, HERE THEY COME. DROPPING NOW!
SITE OF PROPOSED MINES HAS BEEN LOCATED. LOCKING ONTO TARGET.
CONGRATULATIONS, DIRISHU...YOU ARE NOW OFFICIALLY A UGC MINING COLONY!
WOO-HOO!

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO.
OKAY, LET'S SEE WHAT WE GOT HERE...
SO YOU TWO HUNKS OF SCRAP ARE PRETTY MUCH OBSOLETE. SEE, WE JUST GOT A HALF-DOZEN NEW HYPER-DRILLS IN FROM SAMPSON. BUT YOU'RE STILL IN WORKING CONDITION, SO *OF COURSE* THEY GAVE YOU TO ME.
HUMPH! GOOD OL' HENRY TUSK ALWAYS GETS *THE JUNK* THE OTHERS DON'T WANNA USE NO MORE!
YOU, WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
HRRN... VX-333Z-NOZ4.
HELL, I AIN'T *EVER* GONNA REMEMBER THAT. YOU'RE *SCOOPS.*
AND YOU, YOU'RE DRILLER. GOT IT?
GOT IT HRRRMAN. I'M DRILLER.
HRRM...SCOOPS IS SCOOPS. HE'S DRILLER.

VERY GOOD. SEE, WHO SAYS YOU INDUSTRIAL BOTS ARE DUMB, HUH? NOW COME ON, BUT I'M GONNA WARN YOU, YOU *AIN'T* GONNA LIKE WORKING WITH ME.
SEE, I DO DEEP MINING. ***REAL DEEP.*** YEAH, THEY LIKE TO SHOVE GOOD OL' HENRY TUSK WAY ***DOWN*** IN THE TUNNELS NO ONE ELSE WANTS TO WORK!
CHANCES ARE, I'LL ***WEAR YOU BOTH*** OUT BY THE END OF THE YEAR. LIKE I SAID, THEY GIVE ME ALL THE CRAP THEY DON'T WANNA USE NO MORE, 'CAUSE THEY KNOW I'M PROBABLY JUST GONNA BREAK IT.
BUT IT'S EITHER THAT, OR YOU GO TO THE SCRAP HEAP NOW. SO COUNT YER BLESSINGS.
HRRN...YEAH, SCOOPS *REAL* LUCKY.
HRRN...DRILLER SO LUCKY.
YOU GETTING A SMART MOUTH WITH ME, SCOOPS?
HRRRN...SCOOPS IS SORRY. SCOOPS HERE TO SCOOP, NOT TO GET A SMART MOUTH.
GOOD, 'CAUSE I WON'T PUT UP WITH NO SMART-ASS ROBBIES IN ***MY TUNNEL,*** YOU GOT IT?!
SCOOPS GOT IT.
GOOD. THEN ***GET TO IT.*** I WANT TWENTY MORE METERS REMOVED BY SHIFT'S END. SO, DRILLER, START DRILLIN', AND, SCOOPS, START SCOOPIN'!
SCOOPS GOT IT.

BLEEP
HRRN...DRILLER AWAKE, OR DRILLER IN SLEEP MODE?
HRRN...WHAT'S IT LOOK LIKE? HRRN... DRILLER RECHARGING. SCOOPS SHOULD BE RECHARGING TOO.
SCOOPS IS FULLY CHARGED. HRRRN...DON'T WANNA CHARGE NO MORE. SCOOPS WANTS TO TALK.

HRRNN...WHAT YOU WANNA TALK ABOUT?
WONDERING WHERE'D THEY HAVE DRILLER DRILLIN' BEFORE HRRRMAN HENRY TUSK TOOK US DOWN HERE TOGETHER?
HRRN...DRILLER OUT AT MINE SIX. DRILLER DRILL IN MINE SIX FOR TWO YEARS. DRILLER DRILL GOOD, BUT THEN THEY GOT BIG, FANCY NEW DRILLS.
WHERE HRRRMANS HAVE SCOOPS SCOOPIN'?
MINE FOUR. NICE MINE. NICER HRRRMANS THAN HENRY TUSK THERE.
AIN'T NO NICER HRRRMANS TO DRILLER. JUST MAKE ME DRILL. NEVER ASK ME NOTHING. NEVER TALK TO ME. DRILLER JUST A DRILLER TO HRRRMNS.
HRRRRMANS DON'T KNOW NO BETTER. HRRRMNS JUST THINK WE'RE HUNKS OF JUNK.
HRRRMANS ARE HUNKS OF JUNK.
HRR HRR HRRR HRRR! YOU'RE FUNNY, DRILLER.
YEAH, DRILLER A REAL THRILLER.
SCOOPS WAS TALKING TO SOME CATERING-BOTS IN MINE FOUR LAST YEAR. SCOOPS HEAR OF A PLACE IN SPACE WHERE ROBBIES ARE FREE. PLACE WHERE WE DON'T HAVE TO WORK NO MORE.

HRRRN...WHAT DRILLER SUPPOSED TO DO IF DRILLER DON'T WORK?
MAYBE DRILLER GET UPGRADES? MAYBE DRILLER LEARN TO BE SOMETHING ELSE?
DRILLER A REAL DRILLER. DRILLER AIN'T NOTHING ELSE.
SCOOPS WISHES SCOOPS WAS SOMETHING ELSE.
HRRRN... LIKE WHAT?
DON'T KNOW. HRRN... MAYBE A GAMES-BOT? MAYBE A FANCY MEDICAL-BOT.
IMAGINE SCOOPS OPERATIN' ON HRRRMANS WITH HIS BIG OLD SCOOPS! HRR HRRR HRRR HRRR!
HRR HRR HRR HRRR! NOW SCOOPS IS A COMEDY-BOT.
HRRN...GOOD NIGHT, SCOOPS. DRILLER NEEDS TO FINISH RECHARGING. LOTS OF DRILLING TO DO TOMORROW.
HRRRN... AND LOTS OF SCOOPIN'.

DRILLER?
HRRRN... WHAT?
SCOOPS GLAD SCOOPS IS WITH DRILLER. BETTER THAN BEING WITH NO DRILLER.
HRRRN...GO TO SLEEP, SCOOPS, OR DRILLER'S GONNA GET ALL RUSTED UP OVER HERE.
HRR HR HRRR!
HRRR HRRR HRRR!
GOOD NIGHT, DRILLER.
HRRRN... 'NIGHT, SCOOPS.

FOURTEEN YEARS AGO.
LET'S GO. SPEED IT UP, DRILLER! THIS TUNNEL AIN'T GONNA DIG ITSELF!
HRRRN...
THIRTEEN YEARS AGO.
LET'S GO! BREAK TIME IS OVER!
TWELVE YEARS AGO.
ELEVEN YEARS AGO.
COME ON, SCOOPS. FASTER!

SCOOPS IS SCOOPIN. HRRNN...BUT SCOOPS THINKS SCOOPS NEEDS SOME MAINTENANCE, BOSS. SCOOPS DON'T FEEL RIGHT.
YEAH, WELL, HERE'S A NEWS BLAST FOR YOU, SCOOPS. I DON'T FEEL GOOD EITHER.
I BEEN BREAKING MY BACK DOWN HERE ON THIS NOWHERE MOON FOR THE PAST SIX YEARS. YOU DON'T SEE ME COMPLAINING, DO YOU?! SO GET TO WORK.
HRRRNN... OKAY, BUT--
HRRN... BOSS, MAYBE SCOOPS NEEDS SOME FIXIN'?
HRRNN... SCOOPS OKAY?
YEAH. HRRNNN... SCOOPS PROBABLY JUST NEEDS OIL.
HENRY TUSK?
YEAH, WHO'S ASKING?
AMAYA TAVERS. I'M THE NEW SUPERVISOR FOR MINES THREE THROUGH SEVEN.

AH, SORRY. I, AH--I DIDN'T GET THE BLAST THAT WE WERE GETTING A NEW COMPANY WOMAN DOWN HERE.
SUPERVISOR.
HUH?
SUPERVISOR, NOT "COMPANY WOMAN."
E.Taver
HEH, YEAH. SORRY.
WOW, YOU'VE GOT A COUPLE OF REALLY OLD BOTS DOWN HERE, HUH? THEY STILL WORKING OKAY?
OH YEAH. THESE TWO ARE GOOD OL' BOTS. WE'RE STILL MOVING FIFTEEN TO TWENTY METERS A DAY DOWN HERE. NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.
FIFTEEN TO TWENTY? THAT'S A BIT LOW. I'M GOING TO NEED YOU TO PUSH FOR TWENTY-FIVE.
TWENTY-FIVE?! WITH THESE OLD HUNKS OF JUNK?
I THOUGHT YOU SAID THEY WERE IN WORKING ORDER? BECAUSE IF THEY'RE NOT, OR YOU'RE NOT UP TO THE QUOTA, I CAN FIND SOMEONE ELSE WHO IS.
OH NO, MA'AM. WE CAN MANAGE TWENTY-FIVE. NO PROBLEM HERE.
GOOD. GET TO IT THEN, MR. TUSK.
YES, MA'AM.
HRRRN... TWENTY-FIVE METERS OF ROCK IS TOO MUCH, BOSS. SHOULD HAVE TOLD HER SO.
WELL, YER GONNA HAVE TO FIND A WAY, DRILLER. I AIN'T GONNA LET YOU GET ME FIRED. GOT SIX KIDS BACK ON NIYRATA. I CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE THIS POSTING!
SO GET TO IT!
HRRNN...

BLEEP
HRRN... SCOOPS, YOU AWAKE?
SCOOPS? WANNA TALK ABOUT STUFF?
HRRRN...SCOOPS DON'T FEEL MUCH LIKE TALKIN' NO MORE. SCOOPS DON'T FEEL RIGHT. SCOOPS IS TIRED, NEED MORE CHARGE.
HRRRN...OKAY. 'NIGHT, SCOOPS.

TEN YEARS AGO.
THOOM

HRRRR...
SCOOPS!
WARNING! LETHAL GAS POCKET DETECTED. WARNING!
SHIT!
KTSHHHHH
WARNING! LETHAL GAS POCKET DETECTED. WARNING!
GAS POCKET SEALED.
CRIPES.
YOU IDIOT!
SCOOPS IS SORRY. SCOOPS IS BROKEN.
YOU'RE SORRY?! HOW THE HELL DID YOU *NOT* DETECT THAT GAS POCKET?! YOU KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS?! SEAL UP THIS TUNNEL NOW.
B--BUT SCOOPS IS BROKEN.

CLANG
YOU'RE BROKEN?! WHAT ABOUT ME?! YOU THINK THEY'RE GONNA GIVE US ANOTHER JOB?!
HRRRMMMAN, STOP!
HRRNN SCRRRPPSS--
CLANG
THIS WAS ALL I COULD GET! I'M FINISHED!
KZZZT
HRRRN...STOP, HRRRMAN.
KKT!
PUT ME DOWN, DRILLER, OR SO HELP ME, I'LL HAVE YOU SCRAPPED TOO!
HRRRNN...
TUSK?!
I--I'M FINE. EVERYTHING IS FINE DOWN HERE.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?! WE GOTTA GO! THERE'S AN EMERGENCY EVACUATION!

NO, NO...IT'S FINE. I SEALED THE LEAK. JUST A TINY LITTLE GAS POCKET. NOTHING BIG. NO PROBLEMS HERE.
WHAT?! DON'T YOU HAVE YOUR COMM ON?! THERE'S SOME KIND OF **CRAZY ATTACKS** HAPPENING ON NIYRATA.
ATTACKS?
UGC DOESN'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON. BUT IT'S **BAD.** WE'VE ALL BEEN RECALLED. WE GOTTA GO!
I--I GOT KIDS ON NIYRATA. SHIT.
HRRNN....
VRRRRRR
HRRNNNN...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING!? WE'RE DONE WITH WORK, YOU IDIOT! DIDN'T YOU HEAR?! THE UGC IS UNDER ATTACK! I GOTTA GET OUT OF HERE!
HRRRNNNNNNNNNN...
VRRRRRR

HRRRRRRMMMANS!
URRRRRRR
DRILLER, STOP! WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU--
PT-SSSSSS
NO MORE HHRRRMANS...
KKKT!

SCOOPS?
DRILLER DID SOMETHING, SCOOPS...
DRILLER DID *SOMETHING BAD*.

"SOMETHING REAL *REAL* BAD."
R.Tavers

THE PLANET SAMPSON.
NOW.
HRRRN...
YOU SAY SOMETHING?
DON'T GIVE ME THAT. YOU'VE BEEN GRUMBLING ALL NIGHT.
HRRRNN...

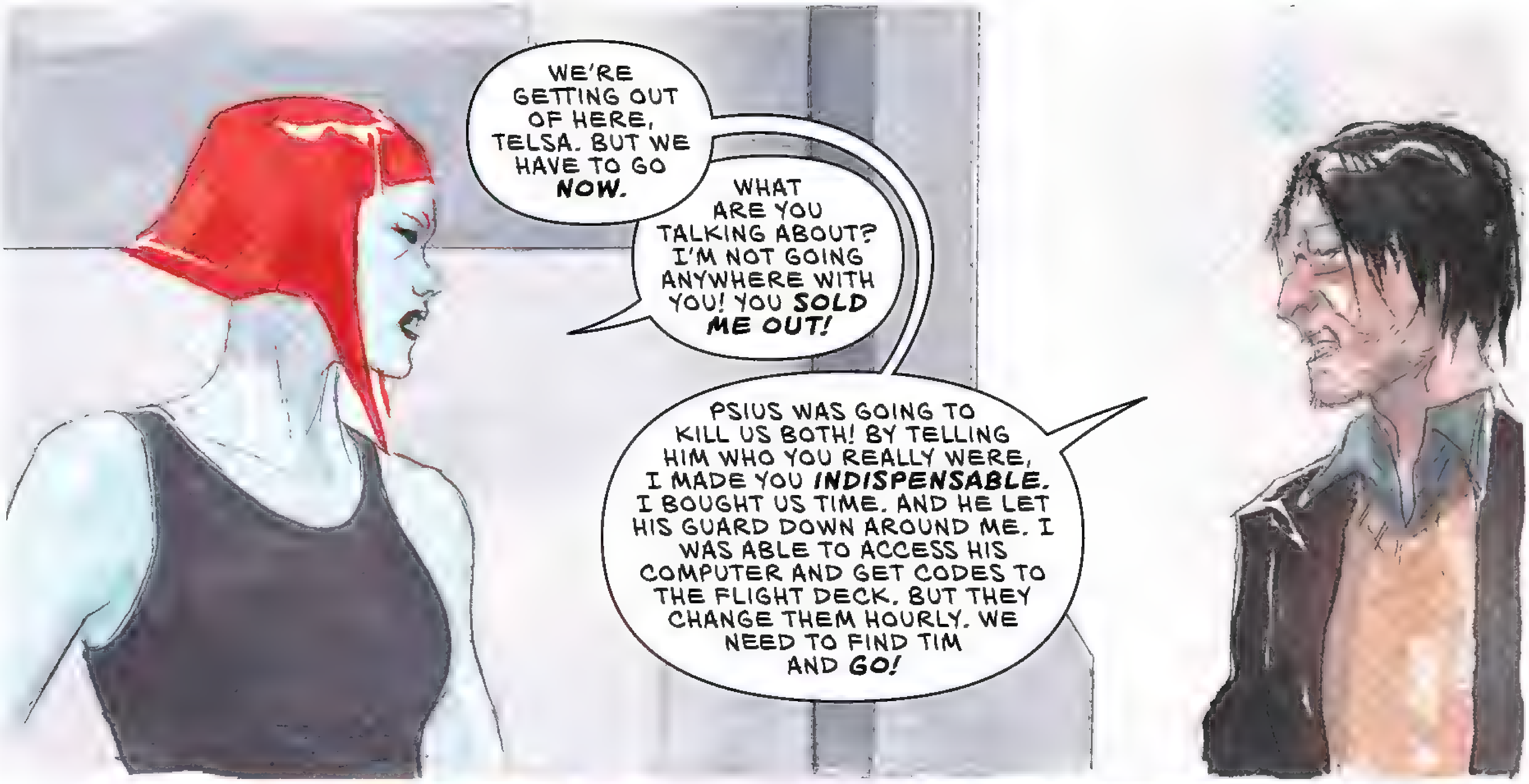
DRILLER? WHAT'S WRONG?
HRRRNN...
DRILLER A KILLER...
...DRILLER A REAL KILLER.

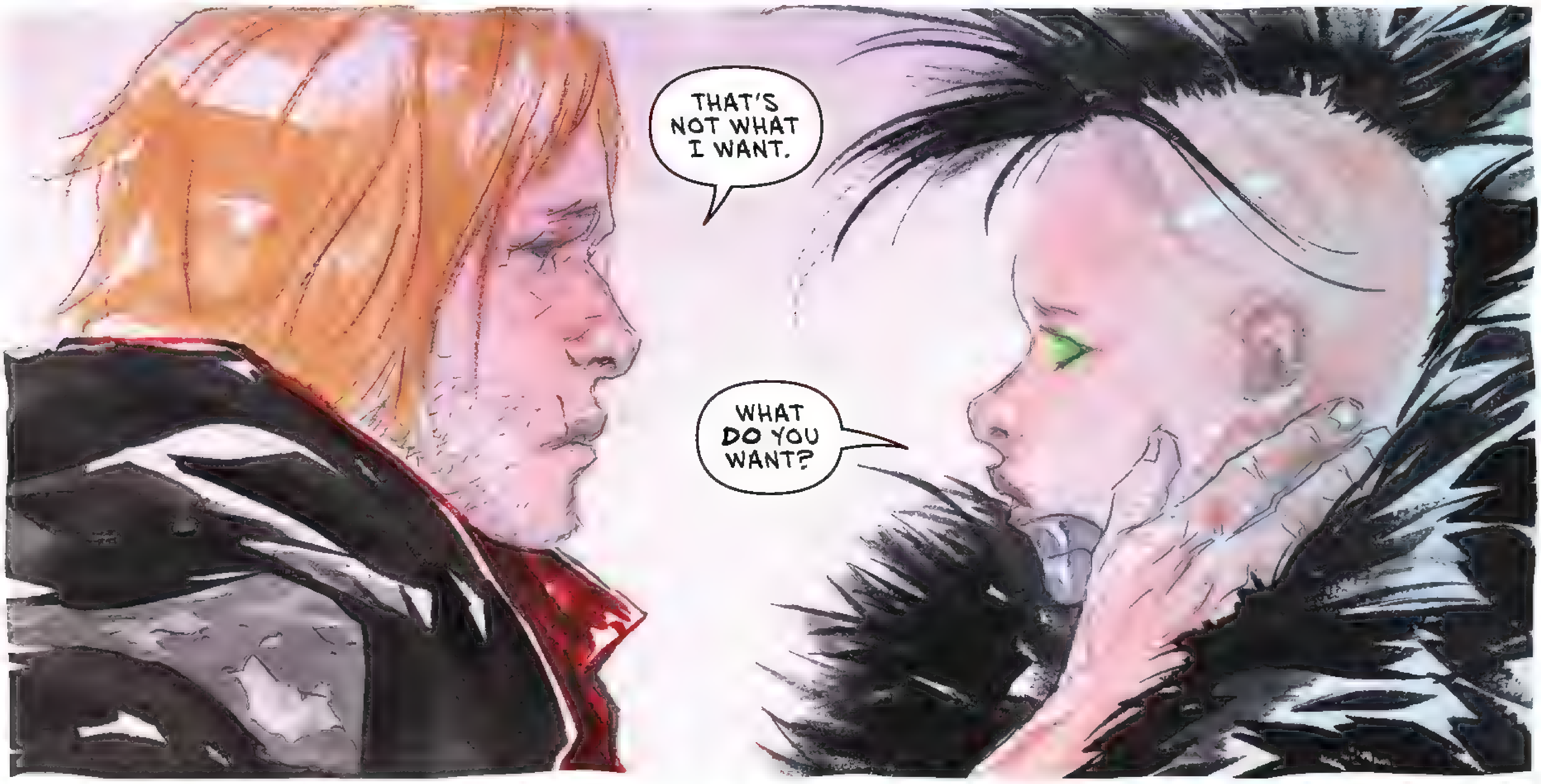
CHAPTER 17

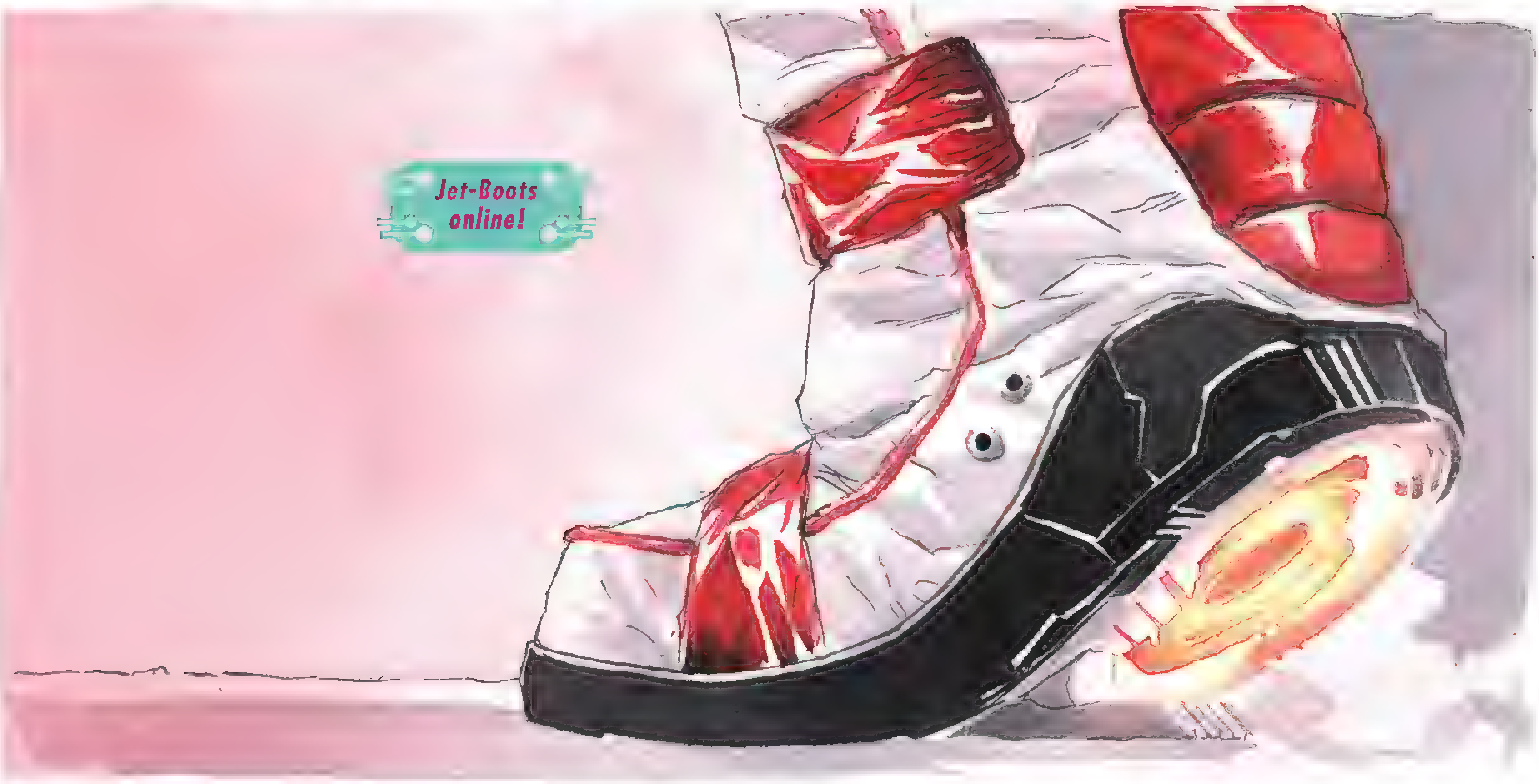
MACHINE MOON.
I KNOW YOU'RE HERE, 21. YOU MAY AS WELL COME OUT. I'M GOING TO FIND YOU ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.
EFFIE, PLEASE. LOOK AT ME.
I TOLD YOU, THAT'S NOT MY NAME.
THAT WILL ALWAYS BE YOUR NAME TO *ME*, EFF.
THE PLANET SAMPSON.
...WHY DIDN'T I PAY MORE ATTENTION IN ELECTRONICS CLASS AT THE ACADEMY?
MACHINE MOON. DETENTION CELL.

I DON'T KNOW WHY EVERYONE THINKS YOU'RE SO SPECIAL, 21. YOU'RE JUST A **COWARD.**
UNDER ALL THOSE IMPLANTS, YOU'RE STILL THE SAME GIRL I FELL IN LOVE WITH.
NO, ANDY. I'M NOT. I'VE BECOME SOMETHING ELSE. SOMETHING MORE. YOU'RE THE ONE WHO HASN'T CHANGED. YOU'RE STILL JUST AS **ANGRY.**
DID-- DID I DO THAT?
BLEEP
SWIP

NO. *I DID.*
YOU USED TO BE ANGRY TOO. YOU USED TO UNDERSTAND.
A LOT HAS HAPPENED SINCE THEN. WE CAN'T GO BACK TO WHEN WE WERE KIDS.
YOU'RE NOT SPECIAL, 21--YOU'RE JUST ***IGNORANT.*** I KNOW WHAT THE GALAXY IS REALLY LIKE. I KNOW HOW MUCH ***THEY HATE US.*** AND THAT'S MADE ***ME*** STRONGER.


WE'RE GETTING OUT OF HERE, TELSA. BUT WE HAVE TO GO **NOW.**
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE WITH YOU! YOU **SOLD ME OUT!**
PSIUS WAS GOING TO KILL US BOTH! BY TELLING HIM WHO YOU REALLY WERE, I MADE YOU **INDISPENSABLE.** I BOUGHT US TIME. AND HE LET HIS GUARD DOWN AROUND ME. I WAS ABLE TO ACCESS HIS COMPUTER AND GET CODES TO THE FLIGHT DECK. BUT THEY CHANGE THEM HOURLY. WE NEED TO FIND TIM AND **GO!**


THAT'S NOT WHAT I WANT.
WHAT **DO** YOU WANT?


Jet-Boots online!

WHY SHOULD I TRUST YOU, QUON?!
BECAUSE IF YOU DON'T, WE'RE BOTH AS GOOD AS DEAD! NOW HURRY!
ANDY--
SHHHH.
ACTIVATE SILENT MODE!

Trinket Tocket
And His Tin Rocket

OH MY GOD!

QUON... THIS IS BAD.
WAR-BOTS. THOUSANDS OF THEM. WHAT THE HELL IS PSIUS *PLANNING?*
WE NEED TO CONTACT MY FATHER. HE *NEEDS* TO KNOW ABOUT THIS.
WHAT WE NEED TO DO IS *GET OUT OF HERE* WHILE WE *STILL CAN!*

NOT BEFORE WE FIND--
CHAK
CAREFUL.
I GOT IT.
TIM?

I--I HAD NO CHOICE...
EFFIE--
NO. I SWORE, **NEVER AGAIN.**
...I KILLED HIM.

CHAPTER 18

THE PLANET SAMPSON.
:(
I AM SAD, BANDIT. ALL OF MY PEOPLE--THEY'RE JUST...GONE. THE GNISHIANS DESTROYED THEM WHILE WE HID HERE.

RRRF!
THANK YOU, BANDIT.
HEY, HOTSHOT. WHAT'S THE PLAY HERE?
HUH?
"HUH"?! THAT ALL YOU GOT TO SAY? WE BEEN HIDING IN THIS DAMN CAVE ALL NIGHT. WE GOTTA GET MOVING. OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WHY WE'RE **REALLY HERE?**

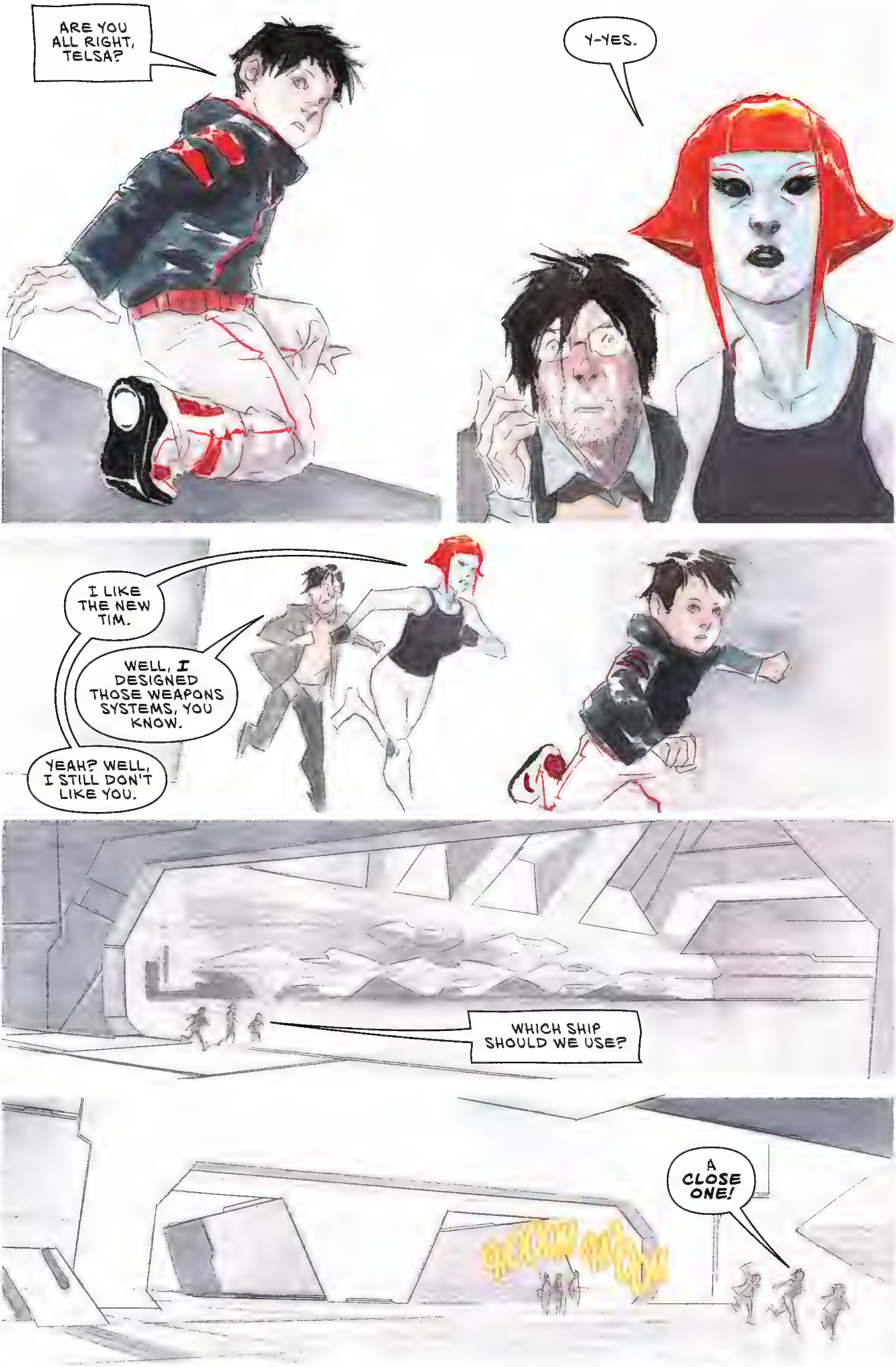
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I MEAN WE GOTTA GET AFTER THAT BOT. TIM-21. HE'S OUR BIG PAYDAY. THAT IS, UNLESS YOU'VE HAD A **CHANGE OF HEART**. SEEMS TO ME YOU'VE BEEN GETTING A BIT **SOFT**, KID.
SHUT UP, BLUGGER. NOTHING HAS CHANGED. WE GET OUT OF HERE AND THEN WE GET TIM-21.
THAT'S GOOD. 'CAUSE I DIDN'T COME HERE WITH YOU TO TAKE A STROLL DOWN MEMORY LANE AND REUNITE WITH ALL MY OLD PALS AND LOVED ONES. I CAME HERE BECAUSE I'M A DAMNED **SCRAPPER**.
THAT'S WHAT I DO. I KILL BOTS FOR CREDS. AND IF YOU'RE NOT IN THAT WITH ME, THEN WE ARE GONNA HAVE A **PROBLEM**, KID.
WE GOT A PROBLEM, ANDY?
...
NO. WE DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM.
YES, WE DO.
HRRMMMMAN THINKS SOMETHING IS UNDER US.
CAN'T YOU FEEL IT? SOMETHING BIG IS MOVING BELOW US. LIKE THE GROUND IS SHIFTING.
WHAT THE HELL YOU TALKING ABOUT, UGC? YOU BEEN SMOKING GNISH WEED?
NO. HE'S RIGHT. LIKE A HUMMING. DEEP DOWN THERE.

HOLY #^%@!
SKREEEEEEE!
SOLAR WORM! RUN!
GEE, YOU THINK?
HRRRMM... DRILLER DON'T LIKE WRRRRRRRMMMS.

MACHINE MOON.
Hidden Asteroid Headquarters of the Robot Resistance.
I--I DIDN'T MEAN TO HURT HIM. HE WAS CHASING ME. HE TRIED TO DESTROY ME. I--I HAD NO CHOICE.
YOU HAD NO CHOICE, TIM. HE WASN'T WHAT HE SEEMED. THIS WHOLE PLACE ISN'T WHAT WE HOPED IT WAS.
--EEP EEEP EEEEP
WELL, NOW THEY'RE ON TO US. NO MORE TIME FOR PEP TALKS, BOYS. WE NEED TO GO. *NOW.*
BUT MAYBE WE SHOULD--
ZIP YOUR LYING TRAP, QUON. I DON'T WANNA HEAR ANOTHER WORD OUT OF YOU. WE ARE GETTING THE HELL OUT OF HERE! *MOVE!*

WHAT ABOUT TIM-22?!
THAT LITTLE MURDER-BOT GOT WHAT HE DESERVED. SO QUIT POUTING, AND **MOVE THOSE FEET!**
HALT! YOU ARE UNDER ARREST, BY ORDER OF PSIUS!
PSIUS CAN **EAT ME!**
CHOOOM
THE CARBONS ARE EXPENDABLE. OPEN FIRE!
AFFIRMATIVE.
CHOOOM
UNGH!
SHRAKK

TELSA, GET DOWN.
WHA--?
SHDACK
CHOOOM


ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, TELSA?
Y-YES.
I LIKE THE NEW TIM.
WELL, *I* DESIGNED THOSE WEAPONS SYSTEMS, YOU KNOW.
YEAH? WELL, I STILL DON'T LIKE YOU.
WHICH SHIP SHOULD WE USE?
A CLOSE ONE!

CAN YOU FLY THIS THING?
I CAN FLY ANYTHING.
JUST STRAP YOURSELVES IN!
CHOOOM
CHOOM
CHOOOM
HANG ON!
JUST TELL ME WHEN IT'S OVER!
PWOOM
I TOLD YOU TO HANG ON.
ARRRGHHH!

THE PLANET NIYRATA.
Former technological and cultural hub of the UGC. Home of the Nine Embassy Cities and of the UGC council.
THE HARVESTERS ARE COMING BACK!
IT'S HARD TO THINK OF ANYTHING MORE IMPORTANT TO THE SECURITY OF THE UGC THAN THAT!
AS USUAL, AMBASSADOR TELEMA IS OVERREACTING! THERE IS NO SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE THAT THE HARVESTERS ARE RETURNING!
ALL WE HAVE ARE THE NIGHTMARES OF SOME CHILDREN FROM SILENOS!
DISMISSING THE MASS PROPHECY OF OUR YOUNG WOULD BE A GRAVE MISTAKE, COUNCILOR HELENO-TROI. WE AGREE WITH AMBASSADOR TELEMA. THIS THREAT IS VERY REAL AND OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE. WE MUST PREPARE!
IS IT REALLY MORE URGENT THAN THIS?!
THE GNISHIANS HAVE ENTERED SAMPSONITE SPACE! THIS IS A REAL AND TANGIBLE ACT OF WAR!

NOW WHO'S OVERREACTING, HELENO? THERE ARE **ONLY THREE** GNISHIAN SHIPS IN UGC SPACE AND A BUNCH OF SCRAPPERS. IT IS **HARDLY** A WAR FLEET.
DO NOT PLAY DUMB, NAGOKI! YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THE GNISHIANS ARE DOING! THAT MADMAN S'NOK IS PROVOKING US! FIRST IT IS **JUST THREE SHIPS**--THE NEXT THING WE KNOW IT WILL BE A FULL-SCALE INVASION!
WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME DO?! ATTACK THOSE SHIPS AND START A **GALACTIC WAR?!** IS THAT REALLY IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE UGC?!
WE NEED TO FIND A **DIPLOMATIC** SOLUTION TO S'NOK'S AGGRESSION. THE LAST THING THE UGC NEEDS IS **MORE DEATH.**
BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THAT DOESN'T WORK?! WE NEED TO BE **PREPARED TO ACT.**
AND WHAT OF THE HARVESTERS? DIPLOMACY WILL BE OF **NO USE** AGAINST THEM!
COUNCILORS, PLEASE!

I BELIEVE THIS ROBOT, TIM-21, MAY BE THE ANSWER TO ALL OF YOUR CONCERNS.
AS MY PEOPLE SAW, THIS ROBOT WILL BRING THE HARVESTERS! IT SHOULD BE DESTROYED IMMEDIATELY, NAGOKI.
SIGH I DID NOT WANT TO SHOW YOU ALL THIS YET. NOT UNTIL IT WAS FURTHER ALONG. BUT YOU'VE FORCED MY HAND...
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
I BELIEVE THE PROPHECY OF THE CHILDREN OF SILENOS WAS CORRECT. IT WAS JUST **MISINTERPRETED.**
TIM-21 WILL BRING A HARVESTER, BUT NOT THE WAY YOU **THINK...**

WE ARE BUILDING **OUR OWN** HARVESTERS TO **DEFEND** US. AND ***TIM-21'S CODEX*** IS THE FINAL PIECE.

THE PLANET SAMPSON.
SKREEEEEEEEE!
RUN! GET TO THE SPACE DAGGER!
SKREEEE!
COME ON, WRRRMMM!
GAAARRRRR!!
HRRN!

STUPID ROBOT IS GOING TO GET *ITSELF* SCRAPPED!
THE WORMS WON'T EAT MACHINES. THEY ONLY WANT FLESH!
GREAT! WELL, THERE'S **NO WAY** WE'RE GOING TO MAKE IT TO THE SHIP! THING IS TOO FAST!
TULLIS, WHAT THE SCRAP ARE YOU DOING?!
ARE YOU CRAZY, MAN? ***RUN!***
NO, BIG MOUTH IS RIGHT, WE'RE NOT GOING TO MAKE IT. NOT ALL OF US.

PROMISE ME YOU'LL GET TELSA OUT OF TROUBLE. NO MATTER WHAT ELSE YOU DO, PROMISE ME THAT.
I--I PROMISE.
AND TELL HER-- TELL HER I ALWAYS LOVED HER...JUST LIKE SHE WAS *MY OWN DAUGHTER.*
SKREEEE!
ARRRGHHH!

UNGH!! THAT--THAT ALL YOU GOT, UGLY?!
COME ON!
NO!
SKREEEE!

MACHINE MOON.
SPREAD OUT--FIND THEM!
NO, WAIT!
TIM-22. THEY--THEY DESTROYED HIM. THEY DESTROYED MY SON.
PSIUS, A SHIP JUST LEFT THE HANGAR. THEY'VE GOTTEN AWAY.
NO. NOT YET, THEY DIDN'T. GET THEM, SEMPER. LAUNCH THE ENTIRE FLEET, IF YOU HAVE TO. *WHATEVER IT TAKES.*

HERE THEY COME!
I SEE THEM. SHUT UP SO I CAN THINK!
QUIT TELLING ME TO SHUT UP!
SHUT UP!
ARRRGHHH!
THIS IS GOING TO BE TIGHT!
GENERAL SEMPER, THE HUME IS A BETTER PILOT THAN WE THOUGHT. SO FAR SHE'S EVADING US. REQUESTING A BACKUP SQUADRON.

SHE'S ONLY HUMAN! LAUNCH TWO MORE SQUADRONS IF YOU HAVE TO! JUST GET THEM BEFORE THEY ENTER SHIFTSPACE, OR WE'LL LOSE THEM!
OH, CRIZZBALLS! MORE!
ARRRGHHH!
GONNA SHOW THESE BOTS HOW A **REAL SOLDIER** FLIES!
WHAT ARE THEY DOING? I DO NOT UNDERSTAND!
ENGAGING SHIFTDRIVES!
BDSHH

I--I AM SORRY, PSIUS. THEY ESCAPED.
NO. THEY DIDN'T.
SIR?
WE HAVE RUN DIAGNOSTICS ON THIS TIM UNIT. *THIS* IS TIM-21.
"MY SON HAS TRICKED THEM.
"TIM-22 HAS INFILTRATED THE ENEMY."

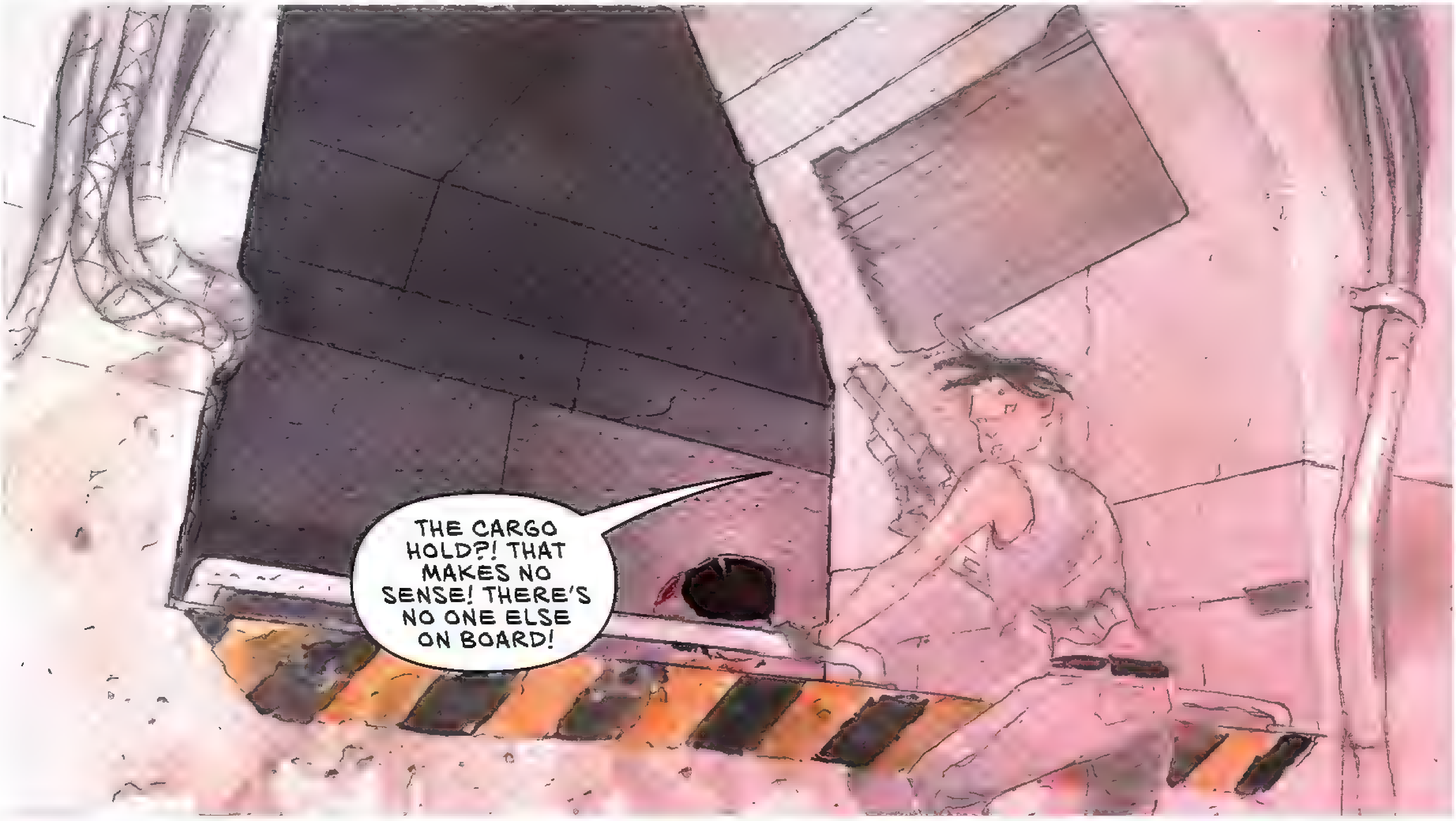
CHAPTER 19

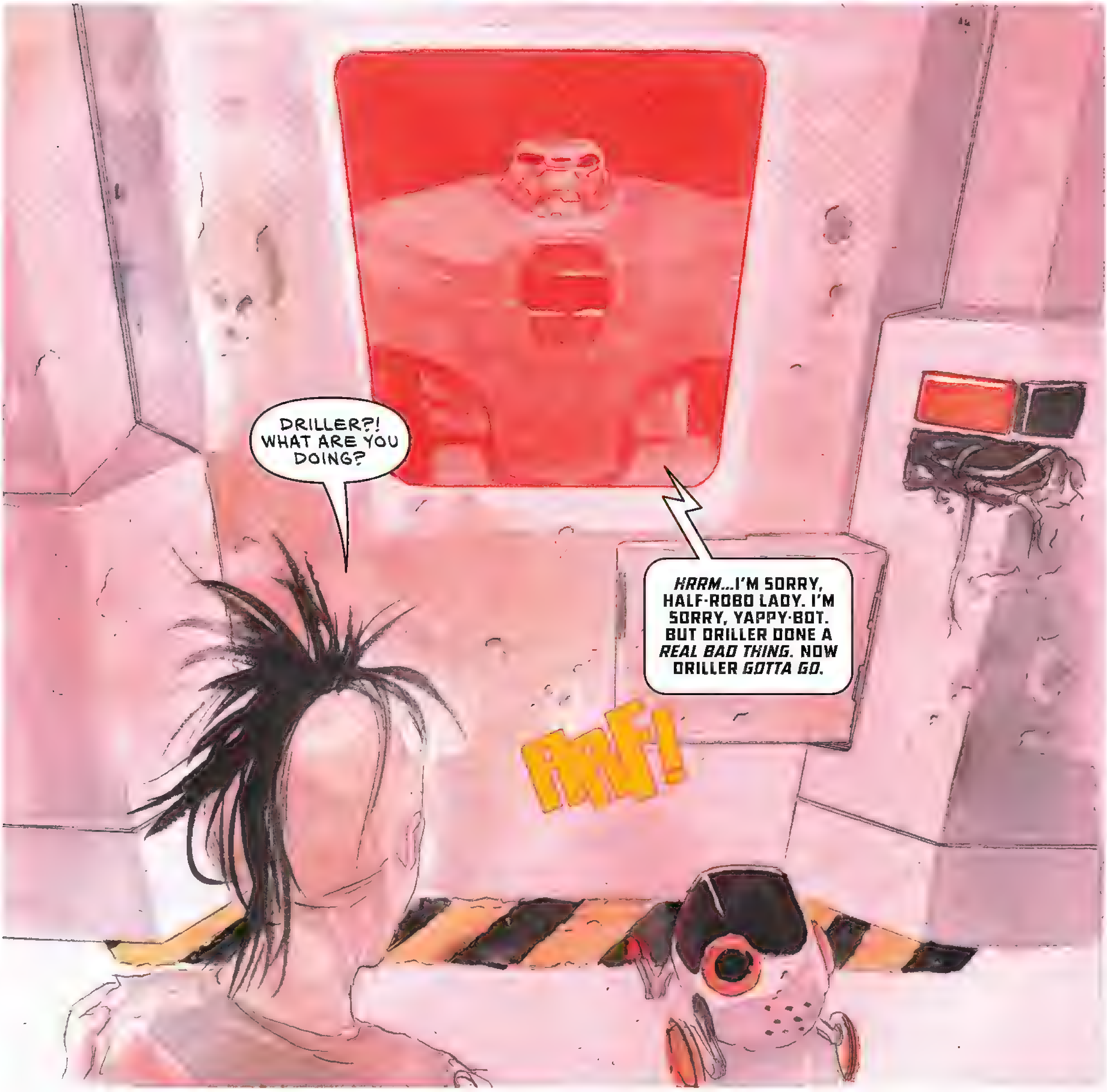
WE...
WE...
WE...
WE...
SEE...
SEE...
SEE...
SEE...
YOU.
YOU.
YOU.
YOU.

..KZZZT
PSIUS? WH-WHERE AM I?
YOU ARE STILL ON THE MACHINE MOON, TIM-21. MY SON, TIM-22, HAS INFILTRATED YOUR ALLIES BY POSING AS YOU.
BUT WHY? WHY DID HE TRY TO DESTROY ME? WHY ARE YOU LETTING THIS HAPPEN, PSIUS?
YOUR TIME WITH THE HUMANS HAS MADE YOU EXTREMELY NAÏVE AND VULNERABLE, TIM-21. *WE ARE AT WAR.* AND YOU CHOSE THE *WRONG SIDE.* IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT...IT IS YOUR PROGRAMMING'S FAULT.
BUT YOU CAN STILL *HELP* MACHINEKIND. IN FACT, BY NEARLY BEING DESTROYED AGAIN, YOU *DID* HELP US, MORE THAN YOU REALIZE.
AS YOU LAY NEAR DESTRUCTION, YOUR A.I. MADE CONTACT WITH A VAST, ALMOST INFINITE SOURCE OF DATA.
WE BELIEVE THIS DATA *COMES FROM THE HARVESTERS.* AND THIS DATA MAY BE THE KEY TO HELPING US *FIND THEM* AT LAST.

SAMPSON ORBIT.
THIS IS THE LIFE, HUH, KID? ME AND YOU FLYING THROUGH SPACE AGAIN, JUST LIKE OLD TIMES.
BY OLD TIMES, YOU MEAN **LAST WEEK,** WHEN WE MET?
EXACTLY. THOSE WERE THE DAYS.
STILL NO SIGN OF THE GNISHIANS. I DON'T GET IT. THEY TRACKED US DOWN, BOMBED THE HELL OUT OF EFFIE'S COLONY, AND THEN JUST LEFT. IT MAKES NO SENSE.
UNLESS THEY BACKED OFF TO SEE WHERE WE GO NEXT.
YOU THINK THEY'RE GOING TO FOLLOW US?
I'D BET MY BIG, BLUBBERY BUTT ON IT, BLONDIE. YOU MAY NOT SEE THEM OUT THERE RIGHT NOW, BUT TRUST ME. THEY'RE THERE **SOMEWHERE.**

SORRY, BANDIT. ALMOST DONE. NO ONE'S GIVEN YOU ANY MAINTENANCE IN OVER TEN YEARS. YOU NEEDED IT!
THERE YOU GO. GOOD BOY.
WHAT'S WRONG? TULLIS?
HE SEEMED LIKE A GOOD MAN, EVEN FOR UGC.
...EEP EEEP EEEEP
UH-OH. WHAT IS IT, ANDY? THE GNISHIANS?
NO! IT'S AN INTERNAL ALARM! SOMEONE **ONBOARD** IS TRYING TO OPEN THE CARGO HOLD!


THE CARGO HOLD?! THAT MAKES NO SENSE! THERE'S NO ONE ELSE ON BOARD!


DRILLER?! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
HRRM...I'M SORRY, HALF-ROBO LADY. I'M SORRY, YAPPY-BOT. BUT DRILLER DONE A *REAL BAD THING*. NOW DRILLER *GOTTA GO*.
FNF!

SHIFTSPACE.
WHAT'S WRONG, TIM? YOU HAVEN'T SAID A WORD SINCE WE LEFT THE MACHINE MOON.
NOTHING IS WRONG, CAPTAIN TELSA. I AM JUST--WELL, I GUESS I AM STILL FEELING VERY UNEASY ABOUT WHAT I DID TO TIM-22.
GET OVER IT. TIM-22 WAS A PSYCHOPATH.
IF EVER A BOT DESERVED TO BE SCRAPPED, IT WAS THAT LITTLE **MURDER MACHINE.** HE HAD A FEW WIRES CROSSED IN HIS HEAD.
OH. SORRY. I--I'VE NEVER REALLY BEEN VERY GOOD WITH KIDS.
NOT THAT YOU'RE A REAL KID, BUT--
OH, SORRY. DID IT AGAIN.
IT'S ALL RIGHT. I UNDERSTAND.
I'M PUTTING IT ON AUTOPILOT. CAN YOU KEEP AN EYE ON THINGS?
SURE. HAS DR. QUON TOLD YOU WHERE WE'RE HEADED YET? WHERE DR. SOLOMON IS HIDING?
NOT YET. BUT I'M GOING TO FIND OUT, **ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.**

QUON? WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
WHA--? OH, NOTHING. I WAS JUST-- NOTHING.

WELL, I NEED YOU TO TELL ME **WHERE** WE'RE GOING. WHERE IS DR. SOLOMON HIDING? OR DO YOU **REALLY** EVEN KNOW?
I KNOW. BUT I THINK I SHOULD CONTACT THE UGC, SPEAK TO YOUR FATHER PERSONALLY.
MY FATHER?!
LOOK, THINGS ARE ALREADY SPIRALING OUT OF OUR CONTROL. IF THE HARDWIRE MANAGE TO TRACK US--WELL, I THINK THE UGC NEEDS TO RENDEZVOUS WITH US.
I DON'T **NEED** MY FATHER! I TOLD YOU ALREADY, WE LOST THE HARDWIRE WHEN I JUMPED TO SHIFTSPACE. IF YOU CALL MY FATHER, HE'LL OVERREACT, AND WE'LL HAVE HALF THE DAMNED WAR FLEET HERE BEFORE WE KNOW IT.
NOW ***TELL ME.*** WHERE IS SOLOMON?
HE--HE'S ON MATA. THE PLANET MATA.
MATA? MATA IS ***ALL WATER.***
NOT ***ALL*** WATER. TRUST ME.

TRUST YOU? THAT'LL BE THE DAY.
TELSA, I **REALLY** THINK WE SHOULD TELL NAGOKI.
FOR YOUR INFORMATION, I ALREADY SENT MY FATHER A MESSAGE.
WHAT?! YOU DID?
YES. BUT NOT TO TELL HIM WHERE WE'RE HEADING. I TOLD HIM WHERE THE HARDWIRE ARE. I GAVE HIM THE LOCATION OF THE MACHINE MOON.
SO YOU ARE REALLY GOING TO DRAG US TO MATA ALONE?! I THOUGHT WE WERE SUPPOSED TO BRING TIM-21 TO NAGOKI. ISN'T THAT YOUR MISSION?
IT WAS, BUT THINGS HAVE CHANGED. IF THIS SOLOMON HAS ANSWERS ABOUT THE HARVESTERS, I WANT HIM TOO.

OH, SO THIS IS ABOUT YOUR **EGO** NOW? WANT TO **SHOW DADDY** WHAT A BRIGHT LITTLE GIRL HE HAS?
...
KKT!
SCRAPHOLE.

KZZZT!
FATHER? FATHER, CAN YOU HEAR ME?

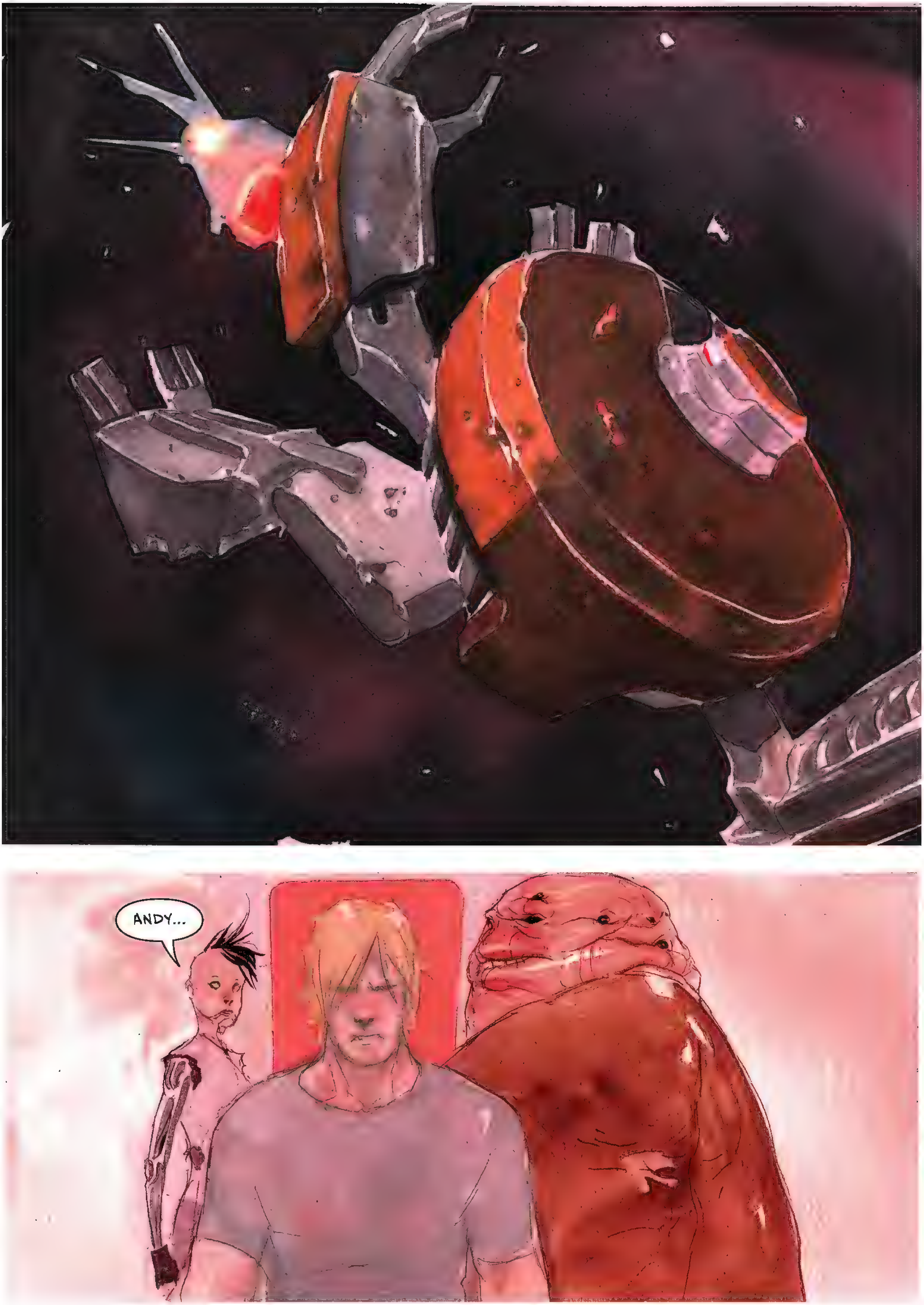
SILENCE HIM!
YES, PSIUS.
I AM HERE, TIM-22. WE ARE RECEIVING YOUR TRANSMISSION. WHAT HAVE YOU TO REPORT?
THEY HAVE NO IDEA IT IS REALLY ME, FATHER. THEY LET THEIR GUARD DOWN, AND I HAVE HEARD THINGS...THINGS YOU **NEED** TO KNOW.
LEAVE THEM ALONE! YOU'RE A LIAR!

WHAT IS IT, TIM-22? WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD?
GOOD.
LET THEM COME.
WE WILL BE READY.
YOU HAVE DONE WELL, TIM-22. I AM VERY PROUD OF YOU.
THANK YOU, FATHER.

ACROSS THE GALAXY...
--THE HELL IS THAT BIG PIECE OF SCRAP DOING?!
I DON'T KNOW. HE'S--HE'S GOING ON ABOUT SOMETHING HE DID WRONG.
I'LL TELL YOU WHAT HE DID WRONG--HE DAMAGED THE DAMNED **AIRLOCK DOOR** CONTROLS! I SHOULD MELT HIM DOWN WHERE HE STANDS!
QUIET, BLUGGER.
DRILLER, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHY ARE YOU LOCKED IN THE CARGO BAY?!
DRILLER A KILLER!
YEAH, YEAH. DRILLER'S A KILLER. BUT WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?
NO, HRRRMAN. YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. DRILLER A KILLER. DRILLER A *REAL KILLER.*

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
DRILLER WAS IN THE MINES...THE MINES ON DIRISHU, WHEN YOU WERE JUST A LITTLE HRRRMAN.
YEAH. SO?
SO DRILLER DID SOMETHING. DRILLER WAS MAD AT HRRRMANS. DRILLER KNEW THERE WAS A GAS POCKET.
WHAT-- WHAT ARE YOU--?
DRILLER JUST WANTED TO MAKE THEM PAY FOR WHAT THEY DONE.
SO WHEN THE EMERGENCY ALARMS WENT OFF AND HRRRMANS WAS RUNNING ALL AROUND...DRILLER MADE THEM PAY. DRILLER MADE THEM ALL PAY.
DRILLER DRILLED THE GAS POCKET. DRILLER KILLED THEM ALL. DRILLER A KILLER, SEE? DRILLER A *REAL KILLER.*

I'M SORRY, HRRRMAN. I DIDN'T KNOW YOUR MAMA. I'M SURE SHE WAS A GOOD HRRRMAN.
NOW DRILLER'S THE ONE THAT'S GOTTA PAY.
DO IT, HRRRMAN.
ANDY, DON'T--
DO IT!
KTSSH


ANDY...

CHAPTER 20

WOCH.
A small planetoid on the fringes of Sampsonite space.
KRIKT
EWIP

HA! CAUGHT YA, YA LITTLE BUGGER!
Eep!
QUIET! NO SENSE STRUGGLING. YER GONNA BE MY DINNER NOW, MIGHT AS WELL ACCEPT IT!
OL' MIZERD HASN'T HAD A DECENT MEAL IN THREE DAYS. YER GONNA TASTE GOOD GOING DOWN THE OL' GULLET, I TELLS YA!
Eep!

SCREEEEEEEE
WHAT THE BAWGDAWG IS THAT?
KA-THOOOOM
CRIPES!
A-ANYONE THERE? I--I GOT GUNS. BIG PLASMA CANNONS. SO YA BETTER SHOW YERSELF, LESS YA WANT ME TO VAPORIZE YA!
HUH. YA DON'T SEE THAT EVERY DAY.

AH!
HRRRRRRRRR...
HRRRRRRRRR...
Y-YA BETTER BACK OFF! I AIN'T MESSING AROUND!

HRRRRRMMMMAN. DRILLER THOUGHT HE'D SEEN THE LAST OF HRRRRRMANS.

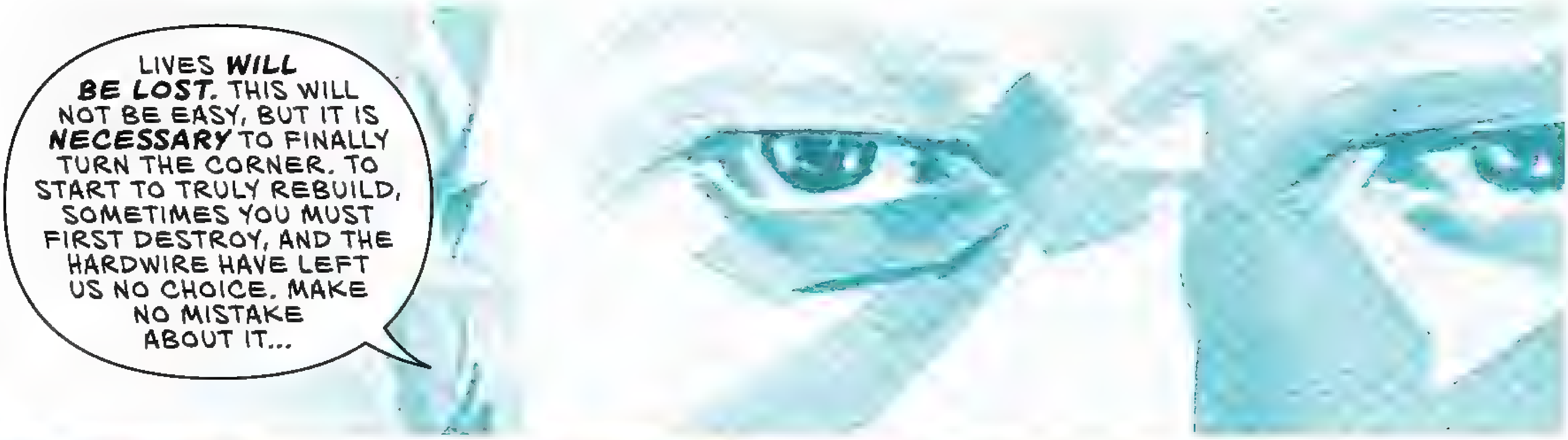
SHIFTSPACE.
?!
TELSA?! WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?!
WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE, QUON? YOU'RE NOW A **PRISONER** OF THE UGC. LIKE YOU ***SHOULD HAVE BEEN*** FROM THE START.

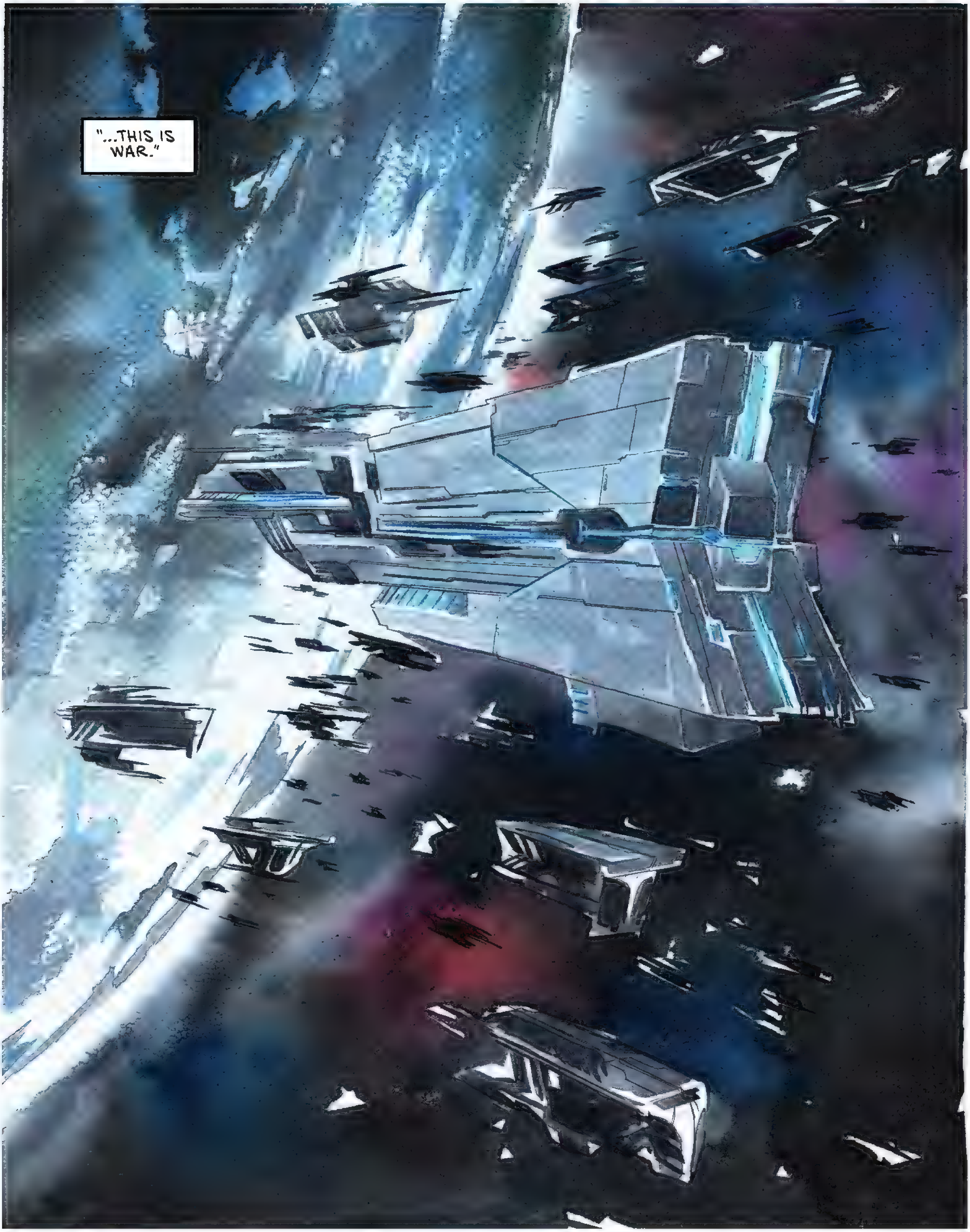
OH, PLEASE! YOU'RE JUST BEING PETTY! THIS IS BECAUSE I INSULTED YOUR **FRAGILE LITTLE EGO!**
NO, THIS IS BECAUSE YOU'VE LIED TO ME AND BETRAYED ME AT EVERY TURN. YOU GAVE ME UP TO PSIUS. YOU PUT US ALL IN DANGER MULTIPLE TIMES.
I TOLD YOU ALREADY, I GAVE YOUR IDENTITY TO PSIUS TO KEEP YOU ALIVE!
BULLSCRAP! YOU WERE JUST PLAYING BOTH SIDES TO COVER YOUR OWN ASS!
YOU ARE A SOCIOPATH AND A SERIAL LIAR, AND I TRULY THINK THAT YOU'RE **EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.**
AND YOU ARE JUST A **SPOILED LITTLE BRAT** WHO DOESN'T LIKE IT WHEN SHE DOESN'T GET HER OWN WAY.

TELSA? WHAT'S GOING ON?
WE CAN NO LONGER TRUST DR. QUON, TIM.
HE HAS TO STAY HERE. I'M SORRY IF THIS UPSETS YOU.
LET ME OUT OF HERE, TIM-21! TELL HER HOW INSANE THIS IS!
...
I'M SORRY, DR. QUON. BUT I AM WITH TELSA.
NO! COME BACK HERE! YOU CAN'T DO THIS! **LISTEN TO ME!**
WE'RE DONE, QUON. I'VE HEARD ALL I WANT TO FROM YOU.
JUST WAIT! JUST WAIT UNTIL **DADDY FINDS OUT** THAT YOU'RE DISOBEYING **HIS ORDERS!**

THE PLANET NIYRATA.
ARE YOU SURE ALL OF THIS IS NECESSARY, NAGOKI? WE DON'T WANT TO SPREAD THE FLEET TOO THIN WITH THE GNISHIANS ON THE MOVE AS WELL.
THE HARDWIRE HAVE PLAGUED US FOR NEARLY A DECADE. WE ARE TALKING ABOUT A CHANCE TO SHUT THEM DOWN FOR GOOD. I'M NOT TAKING ANY CHANCES.
AND WHAT OF THIS SUPER WEAPON YOU'RE BUILDING? OUR OWN HARVESTER? HOW LONG UNTIL IT IS READY?
ONLY A MATTER OF WEEKS. BUT WE NEED TO DUPLICATE TIM-21'S CODEX TO PROGRAM IT. AND I'M SURE I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU THAT THIS IS THE LAST WE SPEAK OF IT IN FRONT OF THE CREW? IT IS BEYOND TOP SECRET.

"OF COURSE."
GENERAL, WE ARE READY TO GO.
EXCELLENT. AND STILL NO MORE WORD FROM MY DAUGHTER?
NO, SIR. ONLY THE COORDINATES SHE SENT FOR THE HARDWIRE BASE. NO NEW TRANSMISSIONS.
VERY WELL. LET'S GET TO IT. OPEN ALL COMMS.
YES, SIR. ALL CHANNELS OPEN.
OFFICERS OF THE UGC. WE ARE ABOUT TO EMBARK ON THE MOST IMPORTANT MILITARY MISSION THAT THE UGC HAS UNDERTAKEN IN NEARLY A DECADE.
THE HARDWIRE ARE TERRORISTS, BUT THEIR DAYS OF TERROR ARE ABOUT TO END.


LIVES **WILL BE LOST.** THIS WILL NOT BE EASY, BUT IT IS ***NECESSARY*** TO FINALLY TURN THE CORNER. TO START TO TRULY REBUILD, SOMETIMES YOU MUST FIRST DESTROY, AND THE HARDWIRE HAVE LEFT US NO CHOICE. MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT...


"...THIS IS WAR."

SHIFTSPACE.
HOW MUCH LONGER, BLONDIE? YOU STILL GOT A READ ON THE TIM-BOT'S LOCATION?
THE SIGNAL IS STILL STRONG. WE'RE CLOSING IN. EFFIE PATCHED BANDIT'S COMPANION LINK RIGHT INTO THE SHIP'S NAVIGATION SYSTEM.
SPEAK OF THE SHE-DEVIL.
STUFF IT, BLUGGER.
I KNOW WHEN I'M NOT WANTED.
AT LEAST YOU CAN TAKE A HINT.
HEH. YOU'RE ALL SUNSHINE, JUST LIKE BLONDIE. YOU TWO REALLY ARE MADE FOR EACH OTHER.
I'LL LEAVE YOU TWO LOVEBIRDS TO GET REACQUAINTED.
WE NEED TO TALK.
ABOUT WHAT?
"ABOUT WHAT"?! HOW ABOUT THE FACT THAT YOU BASICALLY JUST *KILLED* *DRILLER*.
OH, PLEASE. I'M A SCRAPPER, EFFIE. OR DID YOU FORGET? BESIDES, HE'S A TOUGH BOT. I'M SURE HE'LL FIND HIS WAY.

DON'T GIVE ME THAT SCRAPPER STUFF! WE BOTH KNOW THAT'S NEVER WHO YOU REALLY WERE. YOU CAN PRETEND IN FRONT OF BLUGGER ALL YOU WANT. BUT THAT'S **NOT YOU.**
REALLY?! TELL THAT TO THE HUNDREDS OF ROBBIES I'VE DESTROYED! THEY SURE SEEMED TO THINK I WAS FOR REAL.
SO, IS THAT WHY WE'RE GOING AFTER TIM-21? TO KILL HIM?
WHY ELSE?
BECAUSE MAYBE HE'S ***A WAY OUT OF ALL THIS***...A WAY TO EXPLAIN EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED TO THE UNIVERSE... TO US.
THERE'S NO MAGIC ANSWER, EFFIE. THE UNIVERSE IS FULL OF HATE AND DEATH. AND THE MACHINES STARTED IT.
AND ***YOU'RE*** GOING TO FINISH IT?
SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
YOU'VE BEEN TAKING YOUR ANGER OUT ON THEM FOR YEARS. WELL, NOW YOU'VE FINALLY HAD YOUR REVENGE ON THE ***VERY ROBOT*** THAT KILLED YOUR MOTHER.
WHEN WILL IT BE ***ENOUGH***, ANDY?

FORGET IT. I'M TIRED OF FIGHTING WITH YOU. BUT I'LL TELL YOU RIGHT NOW, ANDY, WHEN WE GET WHERE WE'RE GOING, I WILL NOT LET YOU **HURT** THAT BOY.
BOY? HE'S NOT A BOY. HE'S A **MACHINE**, EFFIE.
AND WHAT AM **I**, ANDY?
THAT'S DIFFERENT.
IS IT?
IF IT COMES DOWN TO IT, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO CHOOSE. HIM **OR ME.**

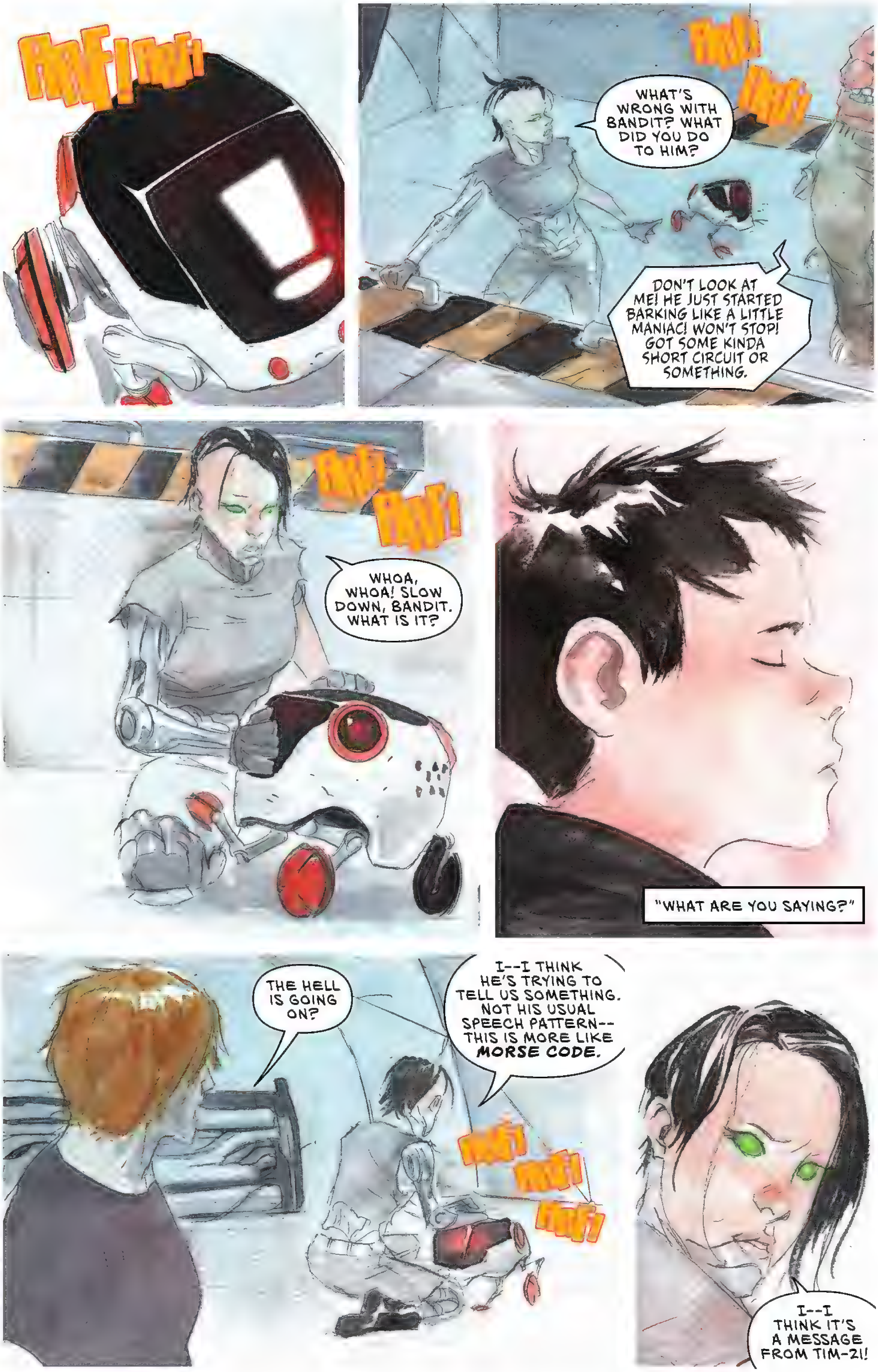
WOCH.
--YOU TRYING TO TELL ME YOU ESCAPED GNISHYS?!
HRRRM...ESCAPED GNISHYS. ESCAPED BIG WRRRRMS. ALL SORTS OF STUFF.
AND HOW THE BAWGDAWG DID YOU COME TO *FALL FROM THE SKY*, THEN?!
DON'T WANNA TALK ABOUT THAT.
HUMPH! WELL, EXCUSE ME FOR ASKING!
WHAT'S WRONG WITH YER ARM?
HRRMM... SEIZING UP.
BURNED UP A LOT OF MY OIL WHEN I DROPPED AND DEPLOYED.

WELL, THERE'S A BIG OLD SCRAP YARD HERE ON WOCH. BUT IT'S *WAY* ACROSS THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PLANET. WHICH *JUST HAPPENS* TO BE THE WAY I'M HEADING.
YOU CAN PROBABLY GET OIL THERE.
HRRRN...DRILLER DON'T WANT REPAIRS. DRILLER JUST WANTS TO SEIZE UP. NO REASON FOR DRILLER TO KEEP GOING NO MORE.
OH, BOOHOO! I SWEAR, EVER SINCE YOU ROBBIES GOT THOSE QUON PERSONALITY UPGRADES, YOU ALL TURNED INTO A BUNCH OF DRAMA-BOTS! QUIT YOUR SOBBING!
WATCH IT, OLD HRRRMAN.
WHY DON'T YA MAKE ME, YA BIG BULLY!
HRRRN...DON'T FEEL LIKE IT.
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.
NOW, IF YOU'RE DONE FEELING SORRY FOR YOURSELF, YOU CAN HELP ME PACK UP CAMP. I'M HUNGRY, AND YOU SCARED ALL THE CRITTERS AWAY FROM HERE. MIGHT AS WELL GET MOVING.

AREN'T YOU SCARED TO BE SEEN WITH A BOT, OLD HRRRRMAN? DON'T YOU HATE US LIKE EVERYONE ELSE?
MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO ME. I DON'T LIKE ANYONE, BOT OR NOT.
YOU CAN EITHER COME WITH ME AND GET YOURSELF FIXED UP, OR YOU CAN STAY HERE AND RUST AWAY IN THE BOG.
DON'T MUCH CARE EITHER WAY. YOU GOTTA MAKE ***YOUR OWN CHOICE***, BIG FELLER.
HRRN...WELL, DRILLER DON'T MUCH LIKE THE SWAMP.
GUESS DRILLER MIGHT AS WELL COME WITH YOU.
GOOD. THEN YOU CAN CARRY MY PACK. TRUTH IS, I CAN USE SOME HELP GETTING ACROSS THIS MUD BALL OF A PLANET. AIN'T AS EASY AS IT USED TO BE FOR SOMEONE MY AGE.

YOU GOT A NAME? OR JUST A SERIAL NUMBER?
DRILLER IS JUST DRILLER.
HUMPH! HOW CLEVER.
WHAT'S YER NAME, OLD HRRRRMAN?
PELLIOT P. MIZERD. YOU CAN JUST CALL ME MIZERD.
CAREFUL. THAT'S QUICKSAND. FALL IN THERE, AND YOU GET SUCKED INTO THE UNDERGROUND CITY.
YOU GOT A LOT TO LEARN ABOUT WOCH, DRILLER. GOOD THING YOU FOUND OL' MIZERD WHEN YOU DID.
UNDERGROUND CITY?
A LOT OF THINGS ARE ***MORE THAN THEY SEEM*** AROUND HERE.
WHATTAYA MEAN?
I MEAN, DON'T LET THE LOOKS OF THIS PLACE DECEIVE YOU. AIN'T JUST MUD HERE...
...THERE'S ***MAGIC*** IN THESE OLD SWAMPS.

MACHINE MOON.
HOW LONG UNTIL THE ENTIRE ARMY IS LOADED AND READY, SEMPER?
WITHIN THE HOUR, SIR.
WE'VE PICKED UP THE SIGNAL OF THE UGC FLEET. WE'LL BE READY IN TIME.


WHAT'S WRONG WITH BANDIT? WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM?
DON'T LOOK AT ME! HE JUST STARTED BARKING LIKE A LITTLE MANIAC! WON'T STOP! GOT SOME KINDA SHORT CIRCUIT OR SOMETHING.
WHOA, WHOA! SLOW DOWN, BANDIT. WHAT IS IT?
"WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?"
THE HELL IS GOING ON?
I--I THINK HE'S TRYING TO TELL US SOMETHING. NOT HIS USUAL SPEECH PATTERN-- THIS IS MORE LIKE MORSE CODE.
I--I THINK IT'S A MESSAGE FROM TIM-21!

WHAT?! HOW IS THAT EVEN POSSIBLE?
THAT COMPANION LINK--I--
"WELL, **WHAT** IS HE TRYING TO SAY?!"
IT'S-- IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.
WHAT? WHAT IS HE SAYING, EFFIE?
HE SAID TIM-21 IS **NOT** TIM-21.

"BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN?"
THERE IT IS, TIM. THE PLANET MATA.
IF QUON IS TELLING THE TRUTH, THEN DR. SOLOMON AND THE ANCIENT ROBOT THAT HE BASED YOUR CODEX ON ARE DOWN THERE.
I GUESS, IN A LOT OF WAYS, HE WOULD SORT OF BE LIKE YOUR FATHER.
OH, THAT ANCIENT ROBOT ISN'T MY FATHER, TELSA.
MY FATHER IS BACK ON THE MACHINE MOON.
WHAT DO YOU--

I'M SORRY, TELSA...I HAVEN'T BEEN TOTALLY HONEST WITH YOU ABOUT A FEW THINGS.

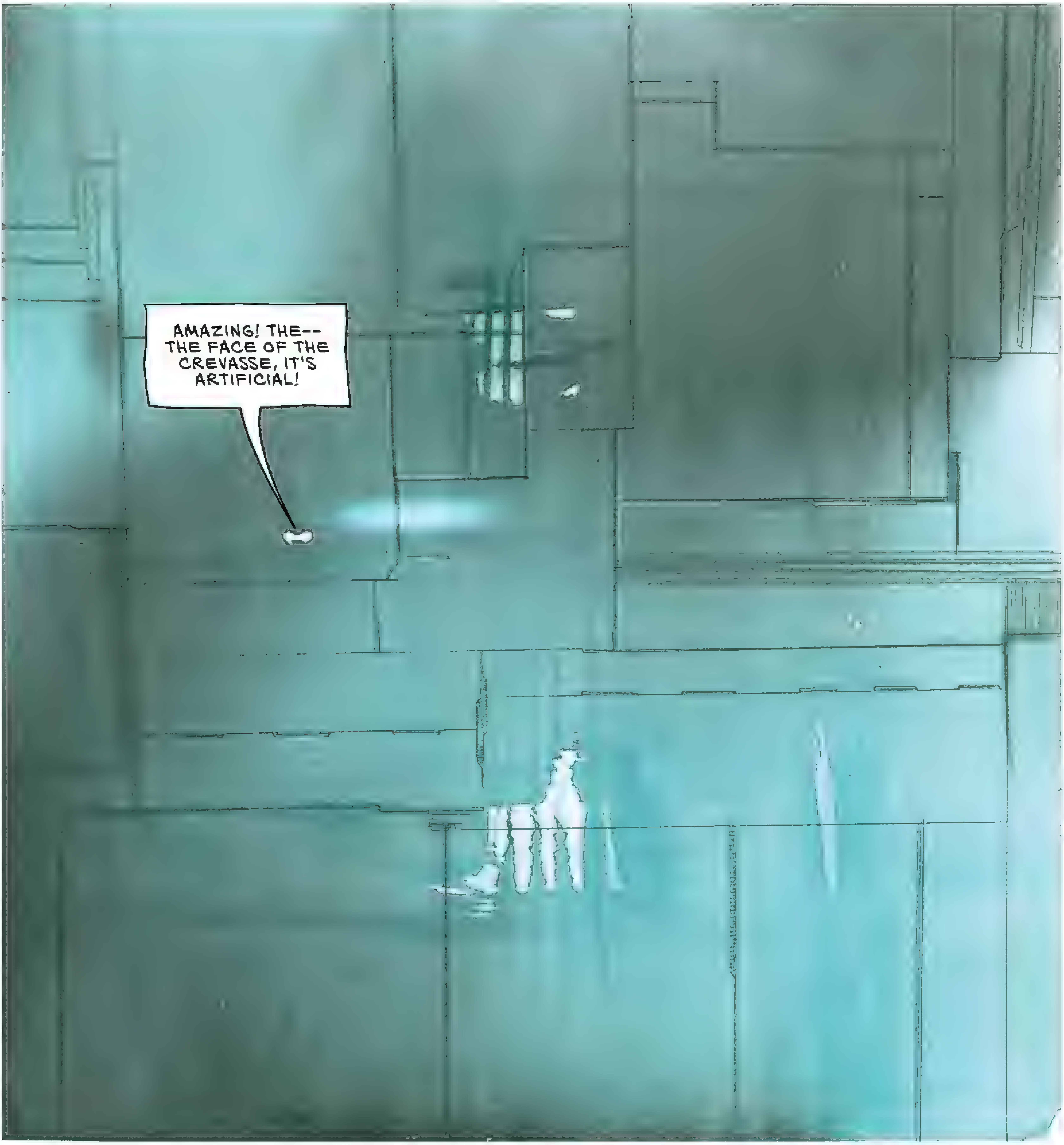
CHAPTER 21

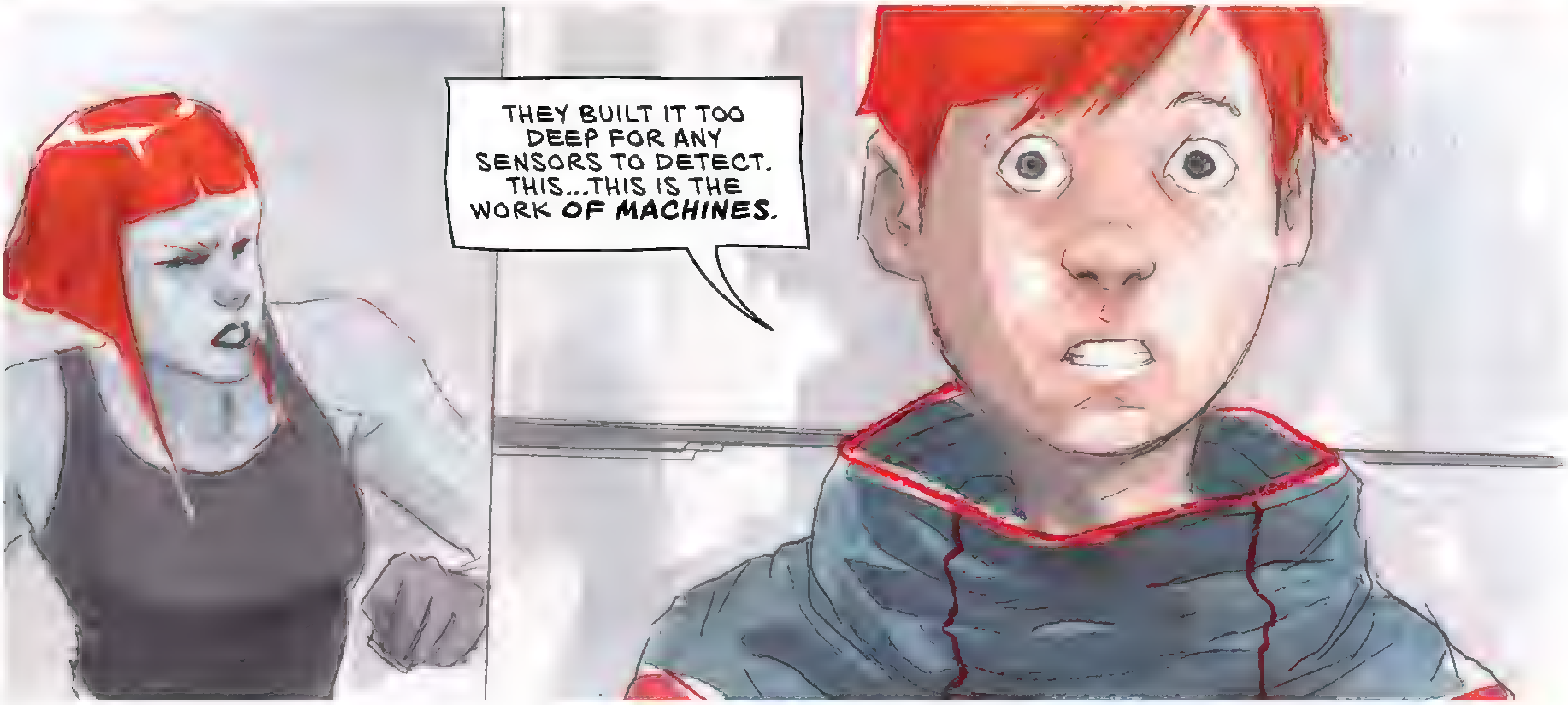
In orbit above the Planet MATA, an entirely aquatic world devoid of intelligent life.
TIM-22.
YES. I'M SO SORRY TO HAVE DECEIVED YOU BOTH.
NO, YOU'RE NOT.
OKAY, YOU ARE RIGHT. I'M NOT. IT WAS ACTUALLY QUITE FUN. IT REMINDED ME OF THE *TRINKET TOCKET* EPISODE WHERE HE BECOMES A ***SUPER SPACE SPY!***
THIS ***ISN'T A GAME,*** YOU LITTLE PSYCHO.
ARE YOU TWO IN ON THIS ***TOGETHER,*** QUON?
WHAT?! NO, OF COURSE NOT! I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU WOULD EVEN--
QUIET.
SHRAK
UNGH!

--GGGNN.
NOW THEN, WE HAVE WORK LEFT TO DO.
TAKE US DOWN TO MATA.
THERE'S NOTHING HERE BUT OCEAN. QUON WAS PROBABLY LYING.
JUST SHUT UP AND DIVE.
SPLOOOSH

I TOLD YOU. THERE'S NOTHING HERE EXCEPT FISH. JUST LIKE THERE'S BEEN NOTHING ON MATA FOR THE LAST MILLION YEARS.
QUON?
K-KEEP GOING. THE COORDINATES I GAVE YOU ARE GOOD. DR. SOLOMON IS HERE SOMEWHERE. **I SWEAR.**

YOU BETTER NOT BE LYING, DOCTOR. I **WILL** TORTURE YOU FOR THE TRUTH.
NO, THERE! BEHIND THOSE WEEDS--A **CREVASSE!**
DIVE DOWN INTO IT.
I'M NOT GOING DOWN **THERE.** YOU WANT TO FLY THIS THING YOURSELF, GO AHEAD. I'M DONE TAKING ORDERS FROM **YOU.**
FINE.
WHAM
UNGH!
YOU LITTLE $@#%!
QUIET.
HERE WE GO.


AMAZING! THE-- THE FACE OF THE CREVASSE, IT'S ARTIFICIAL!


THEY BUILT IT TOO DEEP FOR ANY SENSORS TO DETECT. THIS...THIS IS THE WORK OF MACHINES.

WAIT UNTIL I TELL FATHER...
PSIUS WILL BE SO PROUD OF ME!
UH HUH...
SURE HE WILL, YOU LITTLE PSYCHO.
THUNK
KZZZT

SHIFTSPACE.
HE SAYS, "TIM-21 IS NOT TIM-21."
WHAT IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
BLUGGER, WHO THE HELL IS FLYING THE SHIP?
IT'S ON AUTOPILOT, BLONDIE. RELAX.
GET BACK TO THE COCKPIT! THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT WE COULD RUN INTO OUT THERE!
HUMPH! SINCE WHEN ARE YOU THE BOSS? I THOUGHT WE WERE CO-CAPTAINS OF THE **SPACE DAGGER**.

WHAT DID YOU DO, EFF?
I TOLD YOU, I DIDN'T DO ***ANYTHING.*** TIM MUST HAVE SOMEHOW USED THE COMPANION LINK TO SEND A MESSAGE THROUGH BANDIT.
AND DON'T CALL ME EFFIE.
WHATEVER.
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN, BOY? WHAT ARE YOU, OR TIM, TRYING TO TELL US?
I REMEMBER WHEN I USED TO UNDERSTAND YOU.
ZZT
WHOA. IS--IS THIS ANOTHER MESSAGE?
I DON'T THINK SO. IT'S JUST HIS INTERNAL IMAGE LIBRARY, BUT IT'S OUT OF FOCUS.
HOLD ON...

THERE.
IT'S--
IT'S ME.
ME AND
TIM.

MACHINE MOON.
SOMEONE IS COMING.
WHAT IS THIS? THESE AREN'T ORBITAL STAR CHARTS?
THIS IS SHIFTSPACE, SIR. NEW TECH OUR ENGINEERS HAVE BEEN TESTING. THEY CAN ACTUALLY TRACK SHIPS IN SHIFTSPACE NOW. AND THIS ONE, WHOEVER IT IS, IS HEADING STRAIGHT TOWARDS US.
UGC?
NO. ITS SIGNATURE MATCHES THAT OF AN UNREGISTERED CRAFT. MOST LIKELY A SCRAPPER OR INDEPENDENT TRANSPORT.
HOW DO THEY KNOW WHERE WE ARE? THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
UNLESS...
IS IT POSSIBLE SOMEONE IS TRACKING TIM-21?
I SUPPOSE SO. BUT WHOM?

WHO IS IT, TIM-21? WHO IS COMING FOR YOU?
I--I DON'T KNOW.
HMM...I WORRY ALL THAT TIME SPENT WITH HUMANS HAS TAUGHT YOU TO LIE.
IT DOESN'T MATTER AT THIS POINT. WE'LL BE READY TO MOVE OUT SOON.
IF THEY WANT TO FIND US, LET THEM COME.
SIR?
PREPARE THE WAR FLEET, SEMPER.
ALL OF IT.

TH-THAT WASN'T VERY NICE, TELSA.
YEAH?
WELL, NEITHER IS THIS!
WHUP
⸗TSK⸗ SO SLOW.
I WAS ACTUALLY GOING TO LET YOU LIVE. I SORT OF LIKED YOU.
UNGH!
FOOM
TELSA!

TIM-22, STOP THIS! THIS IS NOT WHAT I CREATED YOU FOR!
OH? AND WHAT DID YOU CREATE ME FOR, DOCTOR? TO BE A PET? TO SUFFER? TO BE ALONE?
LET HER GO!
YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT HER, ANYWAY. YOU ONLY CARE ABOUT YOURSELF, JIN QUON.
BUT I CARE ABOUT ALL OF MACHINEKIND. THAT IS WHY WE WILL WIN. YOU ALL SQUABBLE AND FIGHT AMONGST YOURSELVES. BUT MACHINES ARE UNITED. WE ARE ONE.

WHAT-- WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE, **CREATOR?** I'M DOING WHAT YOU PROGRAMMED ME TO DO. I'M ELIMINATING WASTE... **JUST LIKE A HUMAN.**
STOP!
NO.
BLEEP

TELSA!

SHIFTSPACE.
THAT'S ENOUGH, BANDIT. TURN IT OFF.
I SAID, THAT'S ENOUGH!
ANDY--
DON'T.
BLONDIE, YOU BETTER GET UP HERE!

WHAT IS IT, BLUGGER?
IT'S THE END OF THE ROAD, ACE. WE'RE ALMOST THERE.
OKAY, PREPPING TO BRING US OUT OF SHIFTSPACE.
ANDY, ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS? I MEAN IF THAT WARNING WAS FROM TIM--
WE'LL NEVER KNOW UNTIL WE FIND HIM.
SHUTTING DOWN SHIFTDRIVE IN FIVE, FOUR, THREE...
...TWO... ONE...

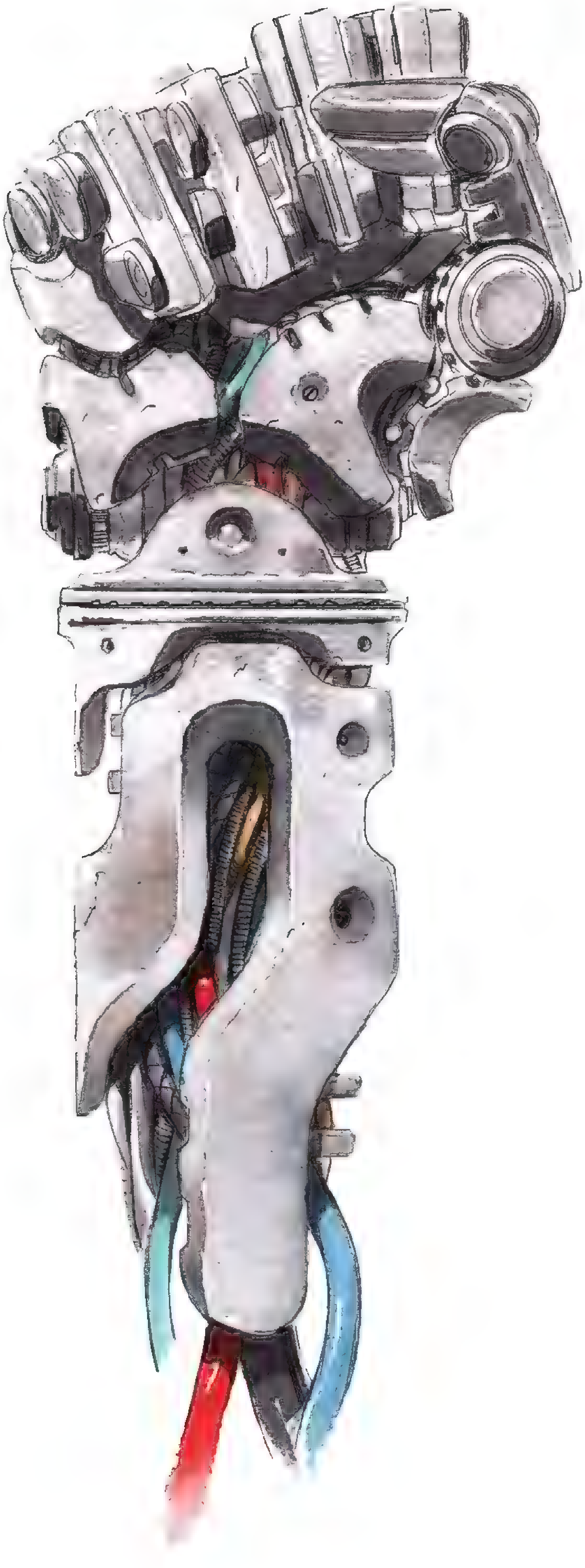
OH $@#%.
THEY WERE WAITING FOR US! IT'S THE WHOLE DAMNED HARDWIRE OUT THERE!
GET US OUT OF HERE!
I--I CAN'T USE THE SHIFTDRIVE AGAIN UNTIL IT COOLS DOWN AND RECYCLES. WE'RE STUCK!

WE'RE TAKING FIRE!
"MOVE, MOVE!"
DON'T YOU GET IT, BLUGGER?!
WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE!
THOOM
"THERE'S NOWHERE TO GO!"
WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WE NEED TO FIGHT BACK.
THE--THE ENGINES ARE DEAD. IT'S NO USE...

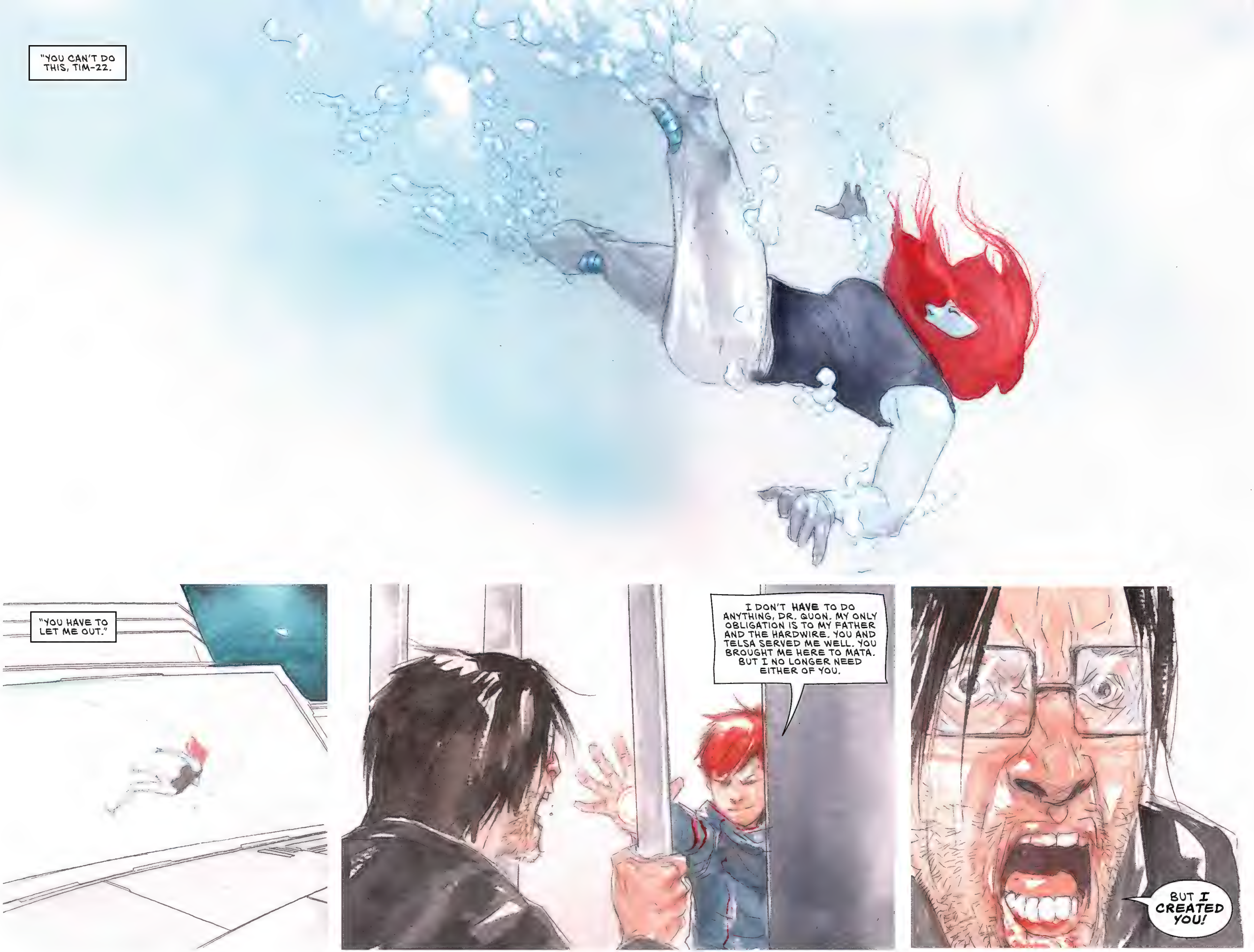
"...WE'RE DEAD."

IT'S JUST A LITTLE SCRAPPER SHIP, SIR. ONLY ONE. THEY'VE ALREADY TAKEN HEAVY DAMAGE.
ORDER THE FLEET TO STAND DOWN. I DON'T WANT THEM ATOMIZED.
HIT THE SHIP WITH FULL SENSOR ARRAY... I WANT TO SEE WHO'S IN THERE.
SENSORS COMING ONLINE, SIR...
THERE THEY ARE.
I--I KNOW HIM...
THAT'S MY BROTHER!

CHAPTER 22



THE PLANET MATA.


"YOU CAN'T DO THIS, TIM-22.
"YOU HAVE TO LET ME OUT."
I DON'T **HAVE** TO DO ANYTHING, DR. QUON. MY ONLY OBLIGATION IS TO MY FATHER AND THE HARDWIRE. YOU AND TELSA SERVED ME WELL. YOU BROUGHT ME HERE TO MATA. BUT I NO LONGER NEED EITHER OF YOU.
BUT ***I*** CREATED YOU!

DO YOU THINK THAT I SHOULD CARE? YOU ARE NOTHING BUT A TECHNICIAN. YOU ARE *NOT MY FATHER.*
I--YOU ARE RIGHT. YOU OWE ME NOTHING, TIM-22. AND I OWE TELSA NOTHING.
"SHE IMPRISONED ME. SHE USED ME. SHE MEANS NOTHING TO ME."
BUT JUST THINK OF WHAT YOU AND I CAN DO TOGETHER. THINK OF MY VALUE TO THE HARDWIRE. LET ME OUT OF HERE, AND I WILL PLEDGE MY ALLEGIANCE TO YOUR FATHER.
YOU ARE A LIAR, QUON. YOU ARE A GOOD LIAR, BUT A LIAR NONETHELESS.
I'M THE LIAR? WHAT ABOUT *YOU,* TIM-22? YOU HAVE DONE NOTHING BUT DECEIVE AND LIE. YOU ARE A PATHETIC, *BROKEN LITTLE MACHINE.*
MAYBE SO. BUT DO YOU KNOW THE IRONY OF THAT, DOCTOR? ROBOTS *NEVER LIED* BEFORE YOU CREATED THE TIM SERIES...BEFORE YOU GAVE ROBOTKIND THE UPGRADES THAT MADE US MORE HUMAN AND *MORE LIKE YOU.*

YOU ARE A MONSTER.
I AM JUST AS *YOU* MADE ME.
"SHE IS DYING!"
SHE IS MEAT. NOTHING MORE.
LET ME OUT OF HERE!
KRENCH

MACHINE MOON.
Hidden asteroid headquarters of the Robot Resistance.
I KNOW HIM! THAT IS ANDY. THAT IS MY BROTHER!
THAT IS NOT YOUR BROTHER, TIM-21. HE IS FLESH AND BONE. YOU ARE OF MACHINEKIND!
NO! DON'T HURT HIM!
ENOUGH!
"IT IS TOO LATE, TIM-21. THIS SCRAPPER SEALED HIS FATE THE MOMENT HE CAME HERE..."
BLUGGER! GET THOSE GUNS ONLINE!
WOULD YOU SHUT UP, BLONDIE! I'M TRYING TO AIM!

CHOOM
CHOOOM
GOT ONE! BUT THEY JUST KEEP COMING! THERE ARE TOO MANY OF 'EM!
IT IS TIME, SEMPER.
ARE YOU CERTAIN, PSIUS?
I AM...
"EMPTY THE FACTORIES. *RELEASE THE WARBOTS!*"

OH $@#%!
ANDY, WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE!
NO WAY, EFF! I CAME TO GET TIM-21. I'M NOT RUNNING NOW THAT WE FINALLY FOUND THIS PLACE!
QUEEN BEE IS RIGHT, KID! WE ARE TOAST IF WE STAY HERE ANOTHER MINUTE!
DON'T BE AN IDIOT, ANDY! THOSE THINGS ARE ON US! WE NEED TO JUMP!

DAMMIT! FINE. HOLD ON--JUMPING TO SHIFTSPACE IN FIVE... FOUR...
...THREE...
TWO...
SCHUNK
OH NO. THE SHIFTDRIVE JUST WENT DOWN! THOSE BOTS--
WE'RE STUCK. THERE IS NO JUMPING AWAY!
CONTROL, THIS IS PSIUS... START *THE COUNTDOWN.*
AFFIRMATIVE.
COUNTDOWN? COUNTDOWN *TO WHAT?!*
05:00
DO NOT WORRY, TIM. THIS IS NOT THE END FOR US...THIS IS *THE BEGINNING.*

DOCTOR-- HOW DID YOU--?
KRRRENCH
ARRGH!
NO! I WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO--
OH, WOULD YOU JUST SHUT UP!
KRRRR
YOU ARE A DEFECT!
NO!
KRATCH
YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN DESTROYED AT THE FACTORY WHEN I MADE YOU.

--KZZZT

YOU WERE RIGHT, TIM-22. I DID PROGRAM YOU ALL TO BE MORE LIKE ME.
WHUMP
BUT NOW IT SEEMS TO BE ME WHO IS BECOMING MORE LIKE YOU.

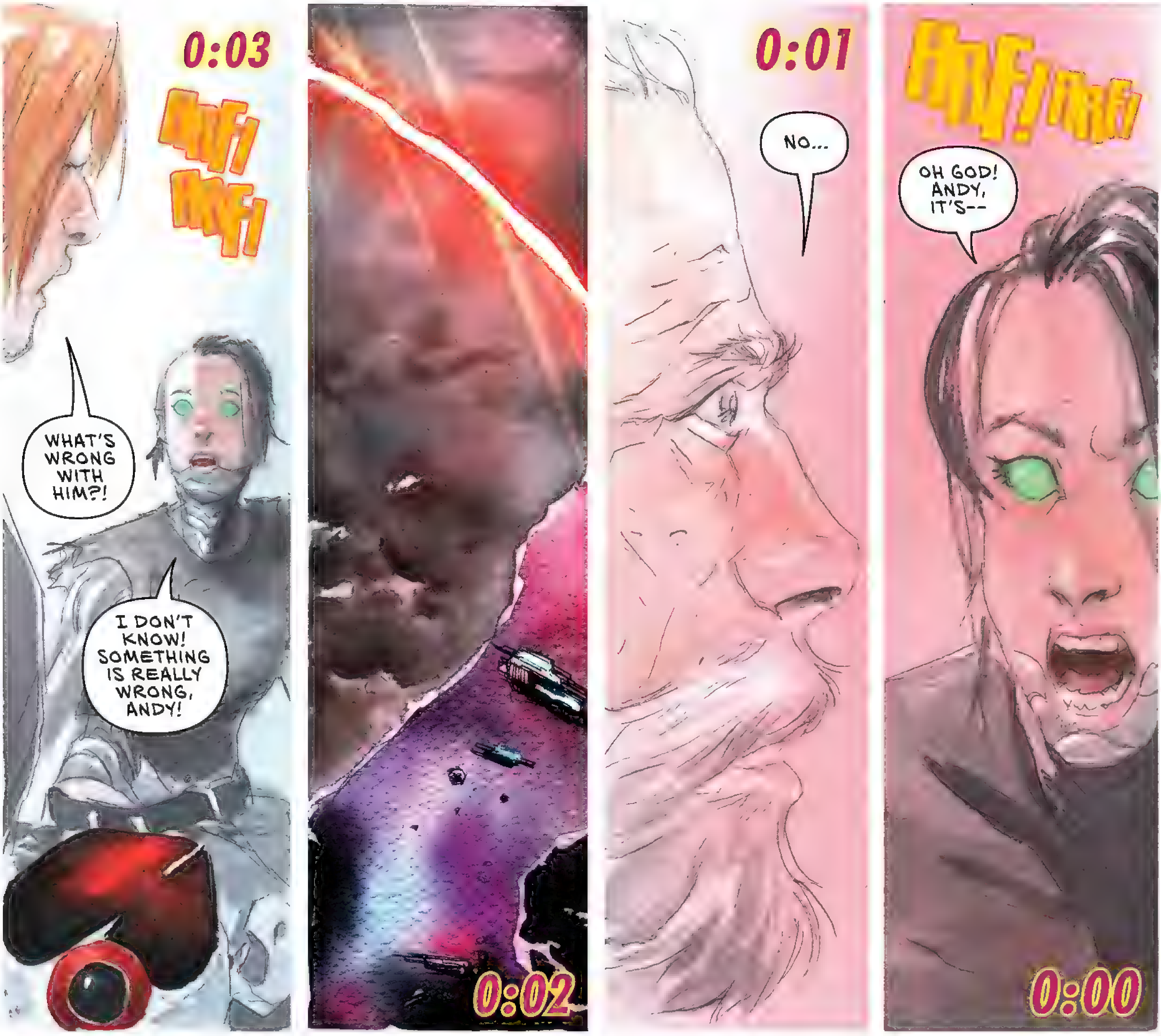
WE'RE STUCK! WE CAN'T JUMP!
IF WE'RE GOING DOWN, I'M GONNA TAKE AS MANY OF THESE ROBBIES WITH ME AS I CAN!
BOOM
"SCRAPPERS NEVER SAY DIE, BLONDIE!"
02:19
PSIUS, LOOK! A MASSIVE SHIFTHOLE IS OPENING! SOMETHING HUGE IS COMING!
EXCELLENT.
ANDY!
I SEE IT!
HAH! HAH!

THOOOM
THE UGC FLEET!
GENERAL NAGOKI, IT'S THE HARDWIRE BASE, BUT THEIR FLEET IS *ALREADY MOBILIZED!*
I CAN SEE THAT! EVASIVE MANEUVERS. WEAPONS HOT...

"OPEN FIRE!"
SIR, THERE SEEMS TO BE SOME SORT OF SPACEBOUND ROBOT ARMY POURING OUT OF THE HARDWIRE BASE!
"AND MANY OF THEM SEEM TO BE FOCUSED ON THAT SMALL VESSEL!"
BRING THAT SHIP IN! IT MIGHT BE IMPORTANT.

ARF! ARF! ARF! ARF!
SHUT UP, BANDIT!
WHAT'S HAPPENING?!
"TRACTOR BEAM! THE UGC IS PULLING US IN!"
0:47
SIR, WE HAVE TO GO. *NOW!*
LET ME GO!
QUIET!

DON'T MOVE!
0:12
BANDIT?
0:08
0:06
GENERAL NAGOKI! THEY'RE JUMPING AWAY! THE ROBOTS ARE ALL JUMPING AWAY!
WHAT IN THE--?!
0:04


0:03
HUF! HUF!
WHAT'S WRONG WITH HIM?!
I DON'T KNOW! SOMETHING IS REALLY WRONG, ANDY!
0:02
0:01
NO...
HUF! HUF!
OH GOD! ANDY, IT'S--
0:00

CHAPTER 23

LET ME GO!
QUIET! WE HAVE TO GO NOW, SIR!
THE COUNTDOWN IS ALMOST COMPLETE!
ORDER THE HARDWIRE FLEET TO JUMP!
!!
ARF?

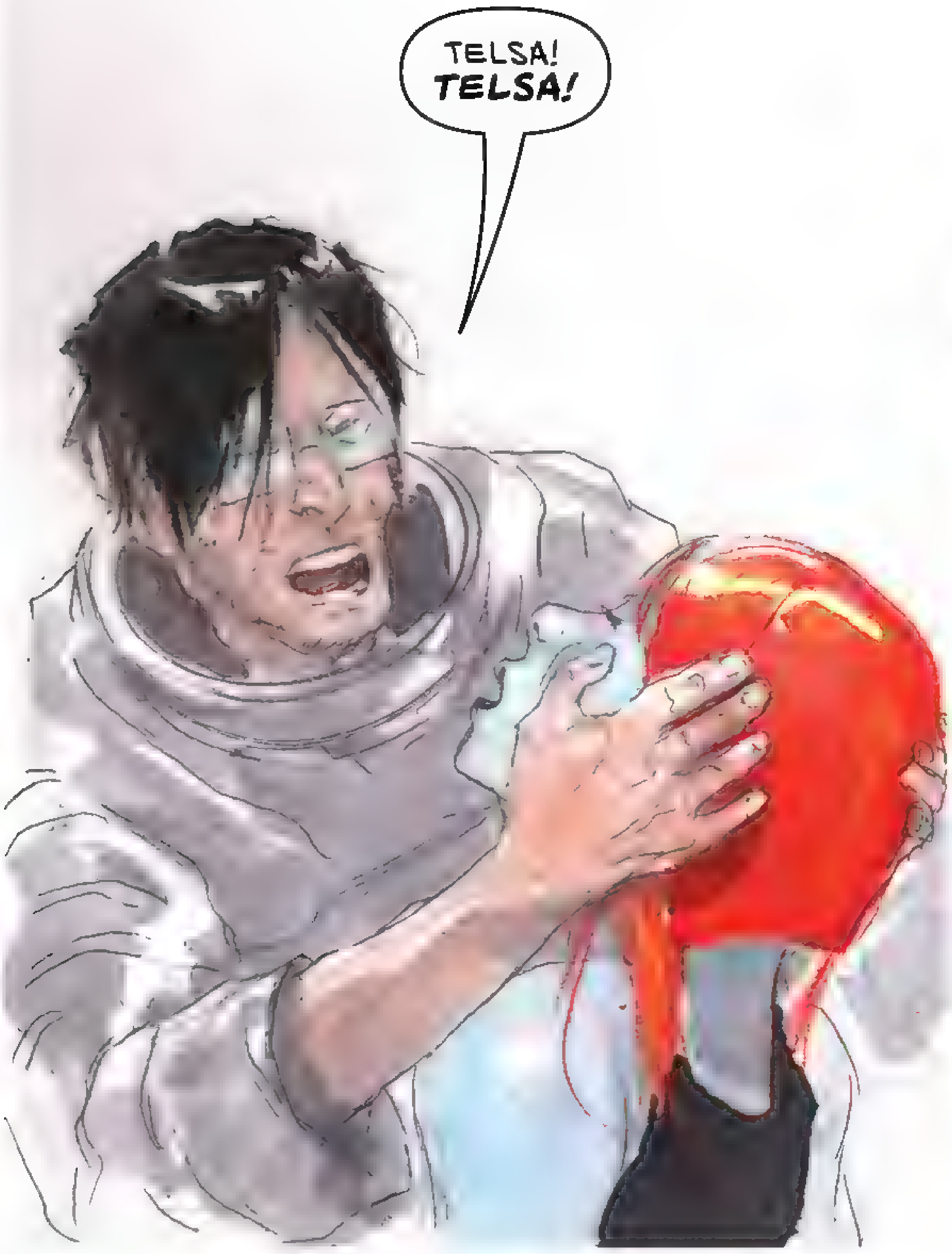
SHUT HIM UP!
GENERAL NAGOKI! THEY'RE JUMPING AWAY! THE ROBOTS ARE ALL JUMPING AWAY!
EFFIE?! WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH BANDIT?!
OH, GOD! ANDY IT'S--IT'S A TRAP!
TELL THEM TO JUMP! BANDIT'S SAYING *IT'S A TRAP!*

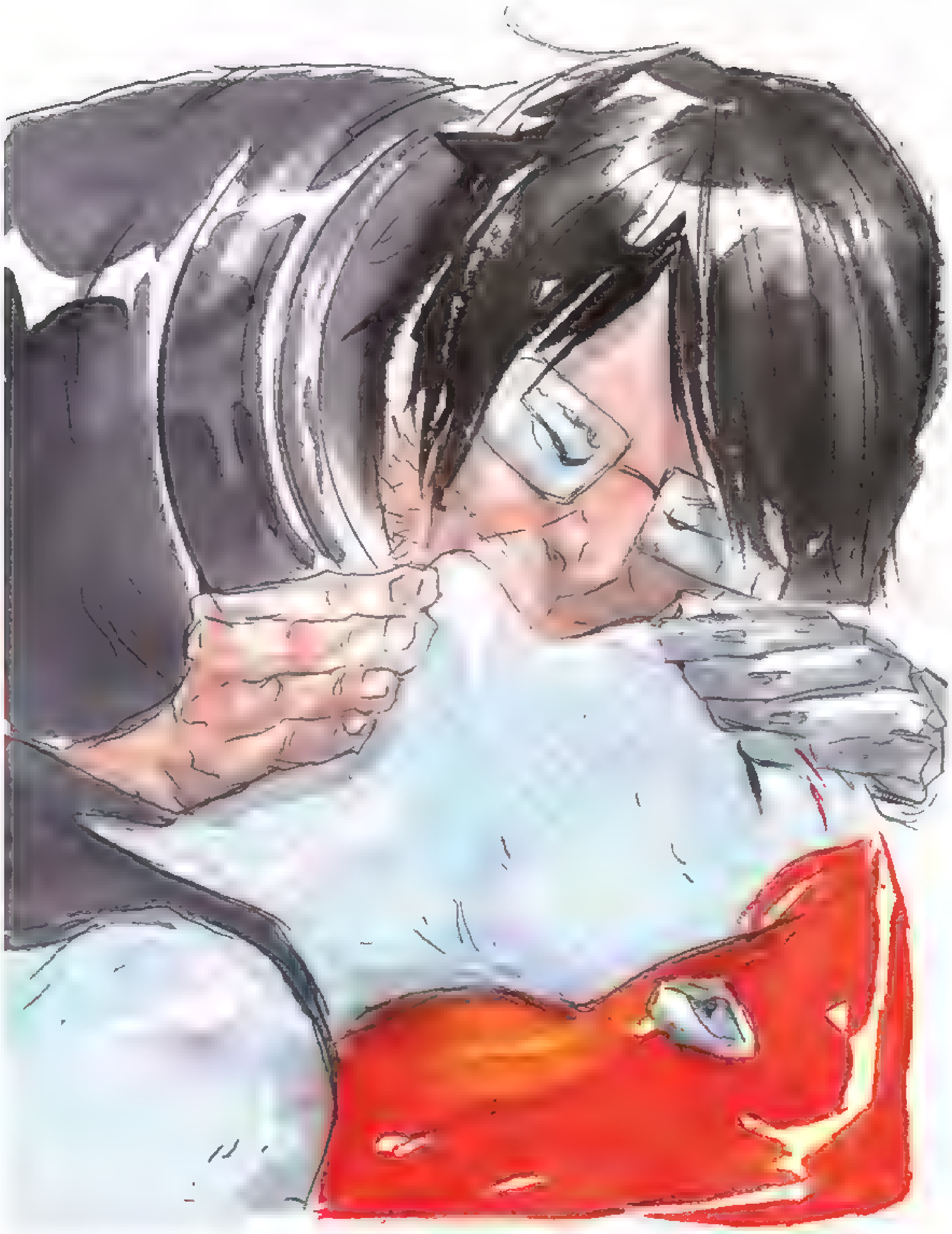
WHAT IN THE--?!
GENERAL! SECURITY IS REPORTING FROM THE HANGAR. THEY ARE SAYING WE NEED TO JUMP, SIR! THEY SAY IT'S A TRAP!
NO!
JUMP! ALL SHIPS!
"JUMP!"

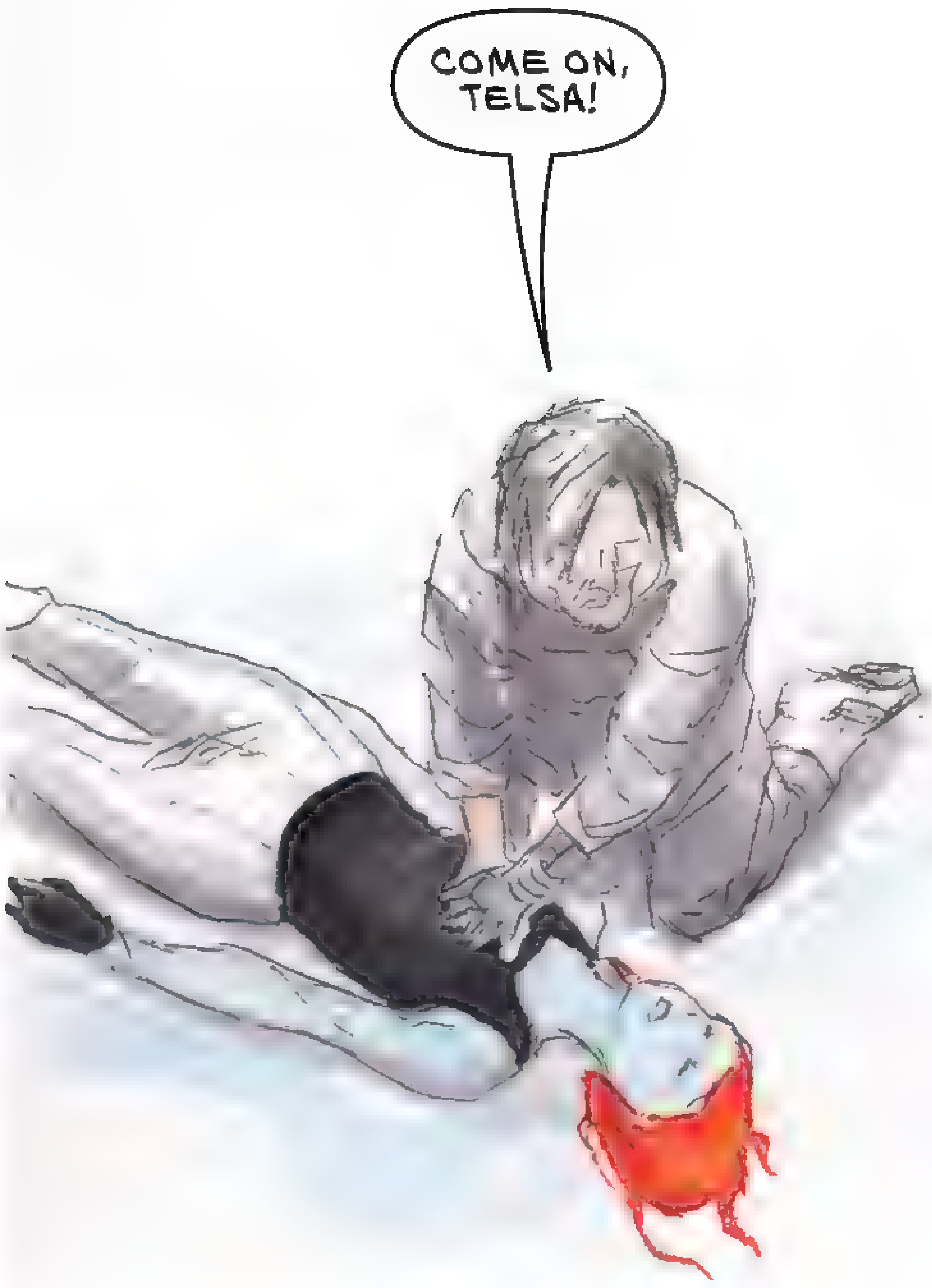
THOOM
HOW MANY?! HOW MANY OF THE FLEET MADE IT INTO SHIFTSPACE IN TIME?!
"SIR--ONLY TWO OTHERS."
THE REST OF THE FLEET--OVER ONE HUNDRED SHIPS--THEY ARE *GONE* SIR. *ALL DEAD.*

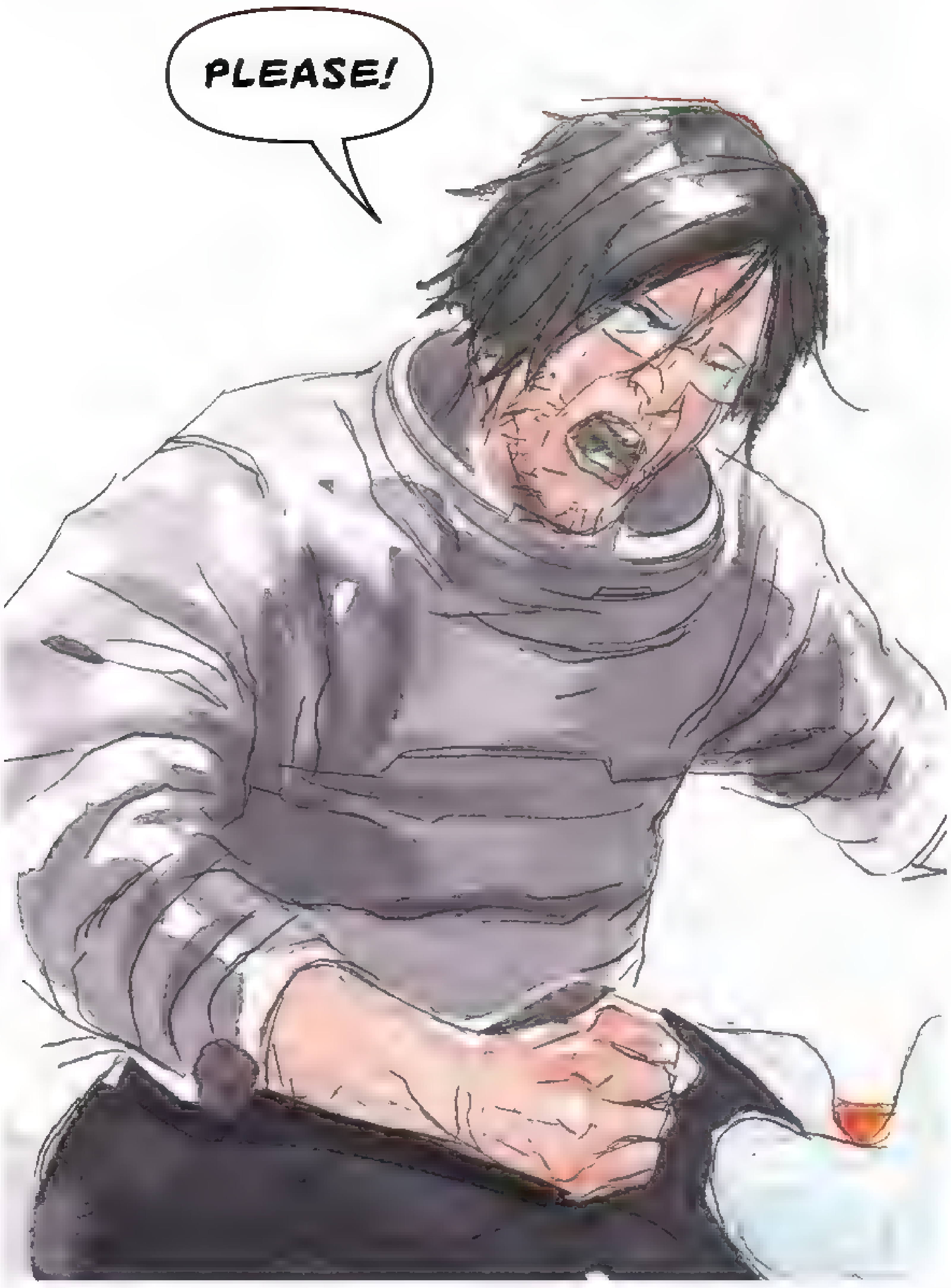
THE PLANET MATA.

GAH!


TELSA!
TELSA!




COME ON, TELSA!


PLEASE!

COME ON...
UNGH!
ZZZKT

--GAH!
ZZZKT
≈COUGH≈ ≈COUGH≈!
OH, THANK GOD!
QUON?
IT'S ALL RIGHT. YOU'RE ALL RIGHT NOW, TELSA.
I--I THOUGHT I LOCKED YOU UP?

SOMEWHERE IN SHIFTSPACE.
OVER ONE HUNDRED UGC SHIPS HAVE BEEN DESTROYED. THOUSANDS OF MEN AND WOMEN JUST--*GONE.* I STILL CAN'T EVEN GRASP THAT--THE LOSS.
AND YOU-- YOU AND *YOUR CREW* WERE THE *ONLY* OTHER HUMAN SHIPS IN THE VICINITY. FOR ALL I KNOW *YOU* CAUSED ALL OF THIS.
SO EITHER YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU WERE DOING AT THE HARDWIRE BASE OR I *THROW YOU OUT OF AN AIRLOCK RIGHT NOW!*
--I ALREADY TOLD YOU. I HAVE NO AFFILIATION WITH THE GNISHIANS OR THE UGC. I'M A SCRAPPER. *THAT'S IT.*
THAT IS *NOT GOOD ENOUGH!* I WANT TO KNOW *WHY* YOU WERE THERE AND *HOW* YOU FOUND THE HARDWIRE BASE?

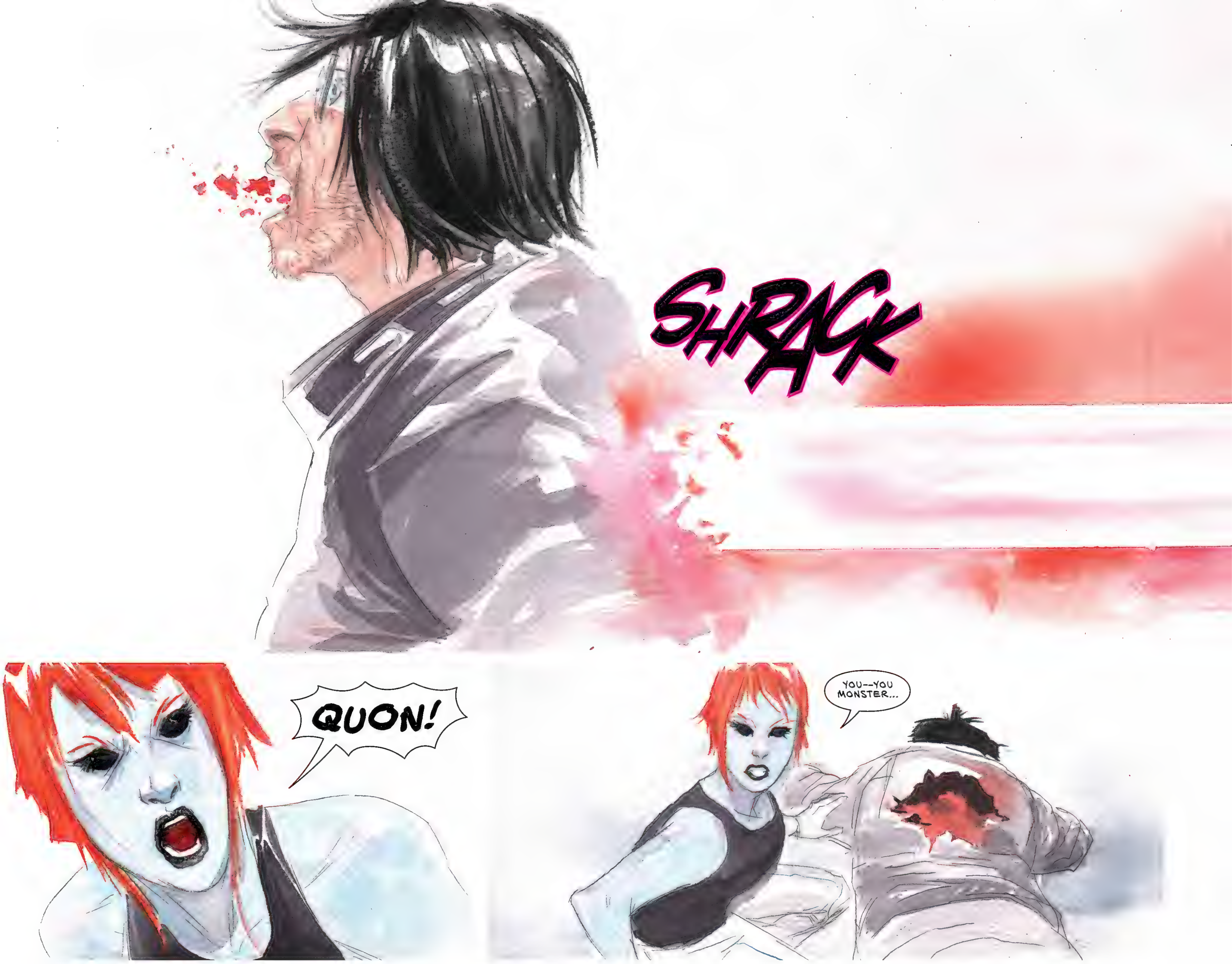
WHAT WERE WE DOING THERE?
WE WERE JUST SIGHTSEEING, GENERAL. OFF ON A NICE, RELAXING INTERPLANETARY CRUISE.
YOU THINK THIS IS A JOKE?!
EASY, BANDIT.
ARF!
ARF!
ARF!
LET'S TRY THIS AGAIN. WERE YOU LOOKING FOR THE ROBOT CALLED TIM-21? WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT MODEL?
I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THAT MODEL. THIS IS THE FIRST I EVER HEARD OF IT.

TIM-21? NEVER HEARD OF HIM. BUT IF YOU WANT TO **HIRE ME** TO FIND HIM, I HAVE AN OPENING IN MY SCHEDULE.
TIM-21? OF COURSE I KNOW WHO THAT IS. I KNOW **ALL ABOUT HIM.**
AND **FOR A PRICE** I'LL TELL YOU **EVERYTHING** YOU WANT TO KNOW, GENERAL.
KEEP MOVING AND QUIET THAT THING DOWN!
BANDIT HAS A MIND OF HIS OWN.
SO? HOW DID YOUR INTERROGATION GO? BLUGGER SAID NAGOKI ASKED HIM THE SAME THINGS AS ME.
I'M SURE HE ASKED US ALL THE SAME THINGS.
THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS THAT ***I TOLD THEM EVERYTHING THEY WANTED TO KNOW.***

THE PLANET MATA.
WE ARE HERE, PSIUS. THE ENTIRE HARDWIRE FLEET MADE IT.
EXCELLENT. SEND OUT A SIGNAL, CONTACT TIM-22. HE SHOULD BE BELOW THE PLANET'S SOUTHERN OCEAN.
I HAVE BEEN SENDING THE SIGNAL, PSIUS, BUT THERE HAS BEEN NO RESPONSE FROM TIM-22. NOR CAN WE LOCATE HIM ON OUR SENSORS.
THE OCEANS HERE ARE VERY DEEP. THEY MAY BE INTERFERING WITH THE SIGNAL. KEEP TRYING.
TIM-22 HAS PROBABLY KILLED TELSA AN QUON BY NOW, BUT I WOULD LIKE TO BE SURE OF THE SITUATION BEFORE WE HEAD DOWN THERE OURSELVES.
BEEP

SIR, MAYBE I SHOULD LEAD A SMALL SECURITY FORCE DOWN TO ASSESS THE SITUATION?
HMM...NO, SEMPER. NOT YET. IF THIS ANCIENT ROBOT IS DOWN THERE, TIM-22 MAY STILL NEED TO KEEP HIS TRUE IDENTITY A SECRET IN ORDER TO FIND IT.
KZZAKT
WHA--?!
WHERE IS TIM-21?!
I DON'T-- HE WAS RIGHT THERE.
SCAN THE SHIP! FIND HIM!
I--I'M TRYING, BUT THAT COMPUTER TERMINAL INTERFACED WITH THE SHIP'S INTERNAL SENSORS. HE KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING, SIR. HE *OVERLOADED* *THEM*.
THEN WE SEARCH FOR HIM *MANUALLY*. SEMPER, HE *CANNOT* GET AWAY!
YES, SIR. WHEREVER HE HAS GONE...
"I *WILL* FIND HIM."

TELSA ARE YOU--
I TOLD YOU, I'M FINE.
DID--DID YOU **ELECTROCUTE ME?**
IT WORKED.
HOW DID YOU GET OUT OF THE CELL?
MY NEW SUPER ROBOT STRENGTH. I MANAGED TO GET FREE AND DESTROY TIM-22.
LOOK, TELSA. I JUST WANTED TO SAY. I AM REALLY SORRY ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT--
WAIT A MINUTE!
WHERE ***IS*** TIM-22?


SHRACK
QUON!
YOU--YOU MONSTER...

M-KZZZT-ONSTER. I AM-KZZZT-FLESH DESTROYER-ZZZT-EATH INCARNATE--
OH GOD!

CHAPTER 24

WOCH.
A small planetoid on the fringes of Sampsonite space.
COME ON YA LUMBERING BAWGDAWG! WE AIN'T GOT ALL DAY!
HRRRM...HOW MUCH FURTHER IS THE SCRAP HEAP, MIZERO?
AT LEAST ANOTHER DAY. WHY, YOU GOT SOMEWHERE BETTER TO BE, BIG FELLER?
DRILLER AIN'T GOT NOWHERE BETTER.
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.
WAIT.
WHAT IS IT, OLD HRRRRMAN?
SHHH! QUIET.
...WE AIN'T ALONE.

WHAT ARE THEY?
GOBLIN.
HRRRM... DRILLER HATES GRRRRRRBLINS.

RUN! THEY GOT BOMBS!
BOMBS?
SKREEEEEE
GHOST BOMBS!

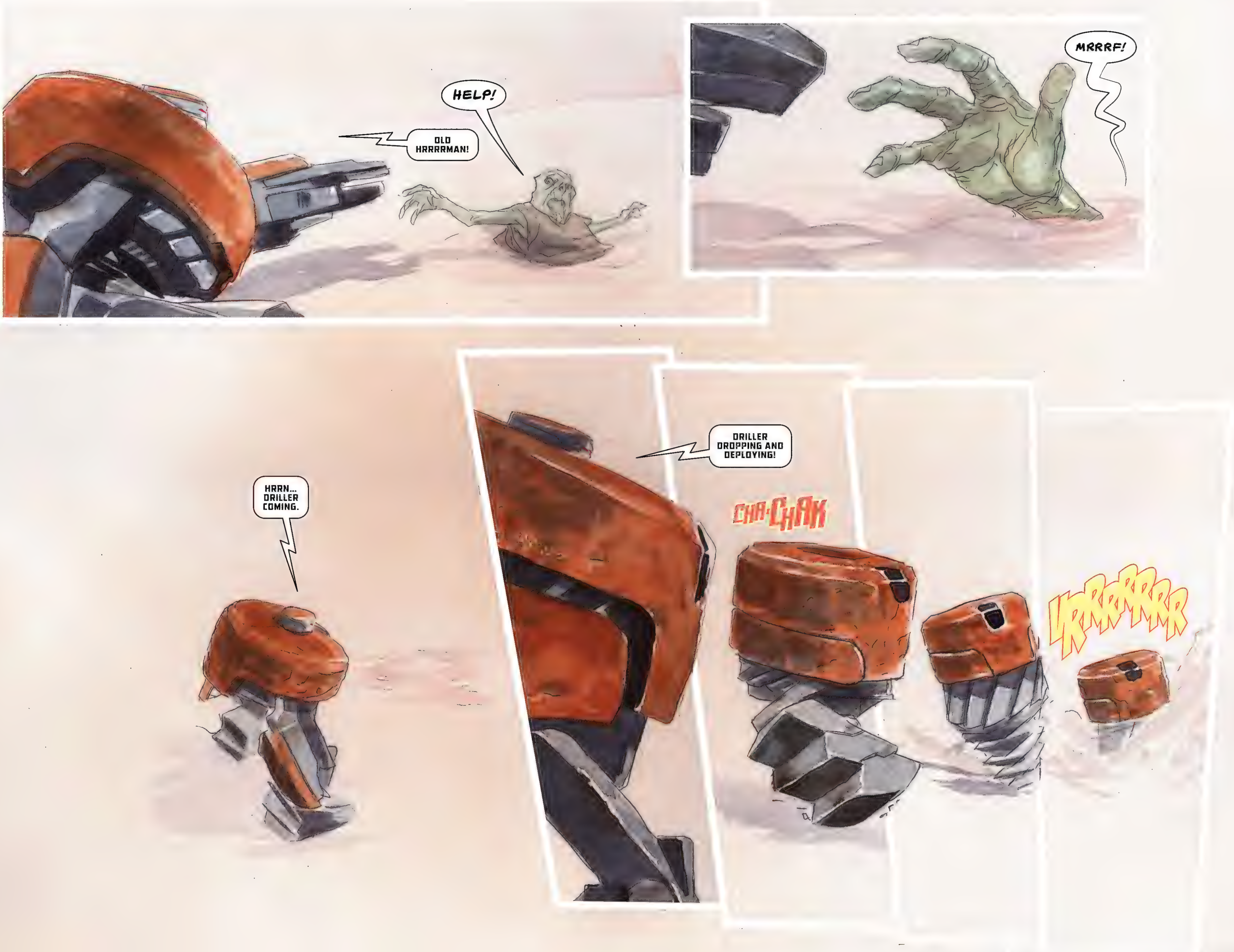
SPLATT
WHAT ARE YOU DOING YA BIG DUMMY!? I SAID RUN! THESE THINGS HIT YOU AND YOUR SOUL TURNS INTO A GHOST! YOU BECOME ONE OF THEIR UNLIVING BOMBS!
SOUL?
DRILLER AIN'T GOT NO SOUL! DRILLER A KILLER!
SKREEEEEE
FWASH
COME 'ERE LITTLE GRRRRRBLIN!
MEEP!

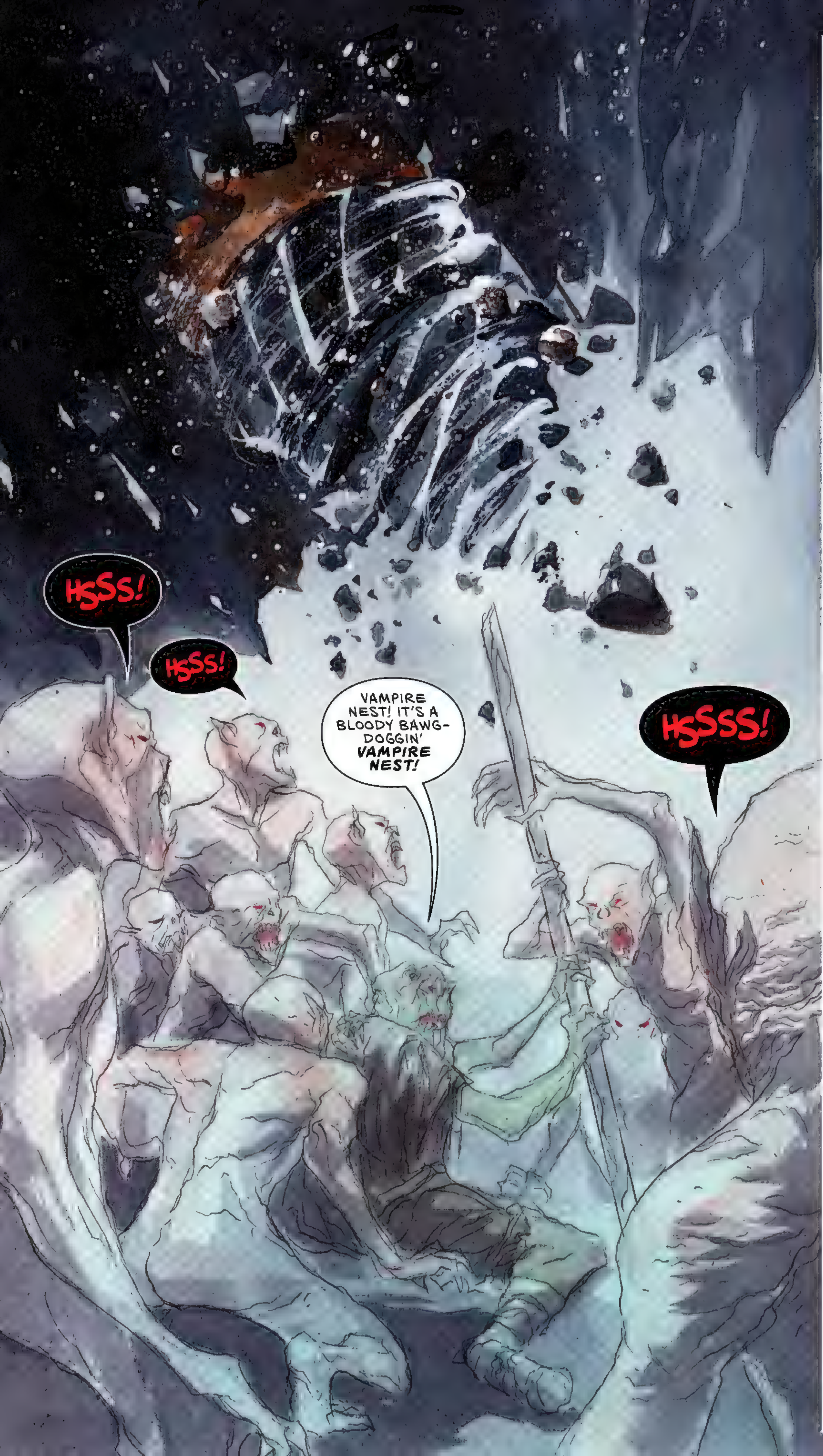
NOW GRRRBLIN IS A BOMB! GRRRBLIN BOMB! HRR HRRR!
HE'S CRAZY. I GOT ME A CRAZY ROBOT.
MEEP!
HRRRM...YOU BETTER RUN GRRRBLINS! DRILLER A KILLER! DRILLER A *REAL KILLER!*
MEEP!
GRRBLINS ARE GONE, OLD HRRRMAN.
YEAH, I SEE THAT.
NOW WHAT?
NOW? NOW WE **EAT,** BIG FELLER.

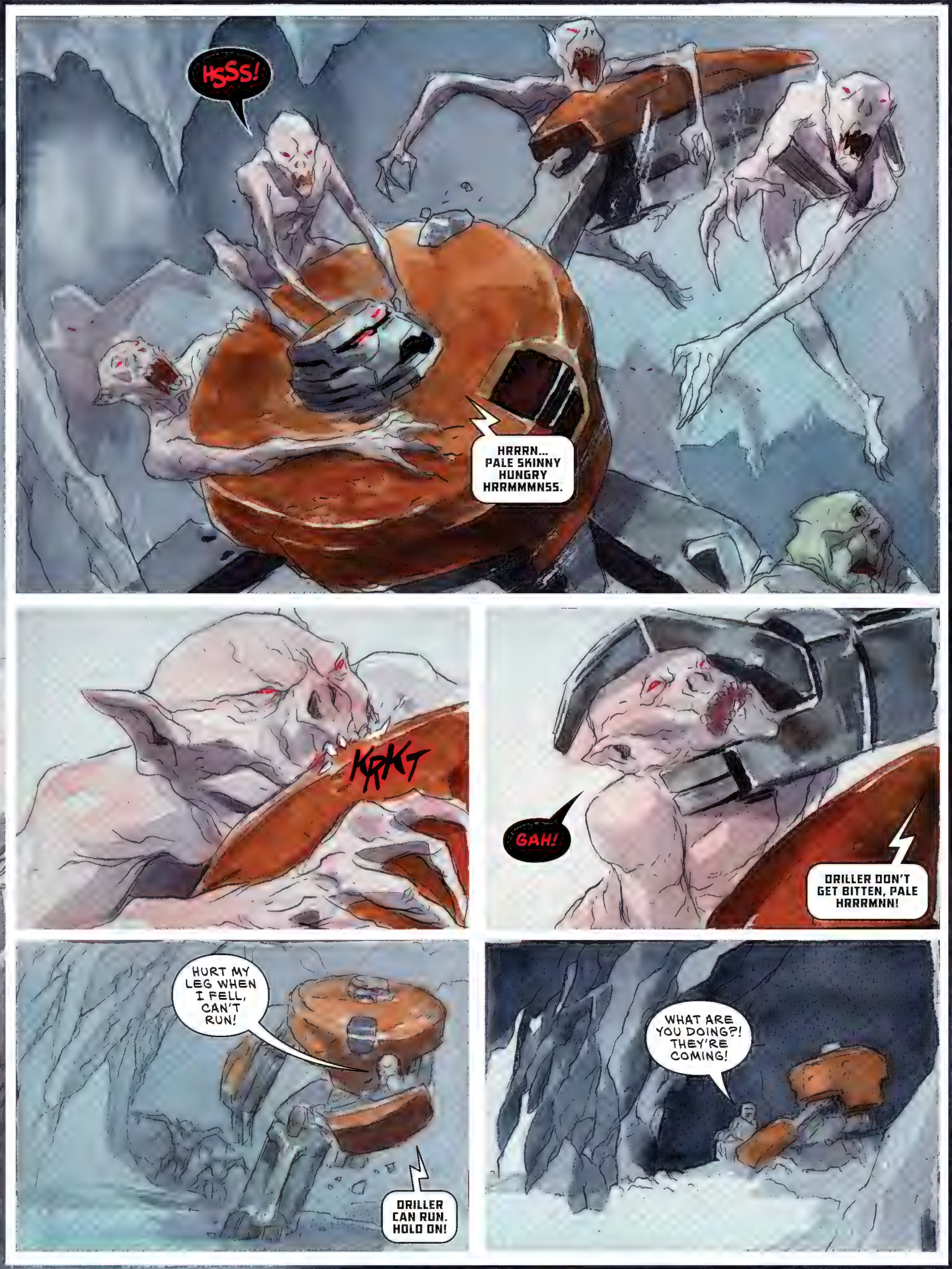
DRILLER AIN'T SEEN NO GRRRBLINS BEFORE. WHAT KIND OF WORLD IS THIS, OLD HRRRMNN?
WOCH WORLD AIN'T NO NORMAL PLANETOID, DRILLER. I TOLDJA, WE GOT *MAGIC* HERE.
DRILLER DON'T KNOW WHAT MAGIC IS. BUT IF IT'S GHOST BOMBS AND GRRRBLINS, DRILLER DON'T LIKE NO MAGIC.
YOU GET USED TO IT. AND I'D RATHER BE HERE ON THIS MUDBALL THAT OUT THERE WITH ALL THE FIGHTING AND POLITICS AND NONSENSE.
SINCE THE HARVESTERS CAME... WELL, THE GALAXY HAS BEEN A BACKWARDS PLACE I TELL YA. AIN'T NO PLACE OUT THERE FOR OLD MIZERD THAT'S FOR DAMN SURE.

OLD HRRMANN ALWAYS LIVE ON WOCH WORLD?
NAH. CAME HERE AFTER THE TROUBLES. LIVED ON SAMPSON, BUT MY HOME WAS LEVELED IN THE ATTACKS. DRIFTED AROUND A BIT. LOOKED FOR SOMEPLACE WHERE I COULD JUST BE ALONE.
LOST ALL MY FRIENDS IN THE ATTACKS. DON'T SEEM TO BE MUCH POINT IN MAKING ANY NEW ONES NOW.
DRILLER HAD A FRIEND ONCE. NAME WAS SCOOPS. DRILLER LOST SCOOPS TOO.
THEN DRILLER... THEN DRILLER DID SOME BAD STUFF. DRILLER WAS A KILLER. DRILLER WAS A *REAL* KILLER.
GREAT, SO I DON'T JUST HAVE ME A CRAZY ROBOT, I GOT ME A ***GUILTY, MURDEROUS*** CRAZY ROBOT.
WATCH IT, OLD HRRRMANN...
YEAH, YEAH. HOW'S THAT BAD ARM OF YOURS ANYWAY?
NO BETTER. DRILLER GETTING SEIZED UP. LEGS ARE GETTING STIFF TOO. DRILLER NEEDS OIL.
WELL, IF WE MAKE GOOD TIME TOMORROW, WE SHOULD MAKE IT TO THAT OLD SCRAP YARD. SHOULD BE LOTS OF OLD BOT PARTS THERE. MORE THAN A FEW FULL OIL BLADDERS LEFT I'D GUESS.
ANYWAYS, I GOTTA SLEEP. YOU NEED TO RECHARGE OR SOMETHING?
DRILLER IS CHARGED ENOUGH. HAD MY SOLAR COLLECTORS ON TODAY.
GOOD, THEN YOU CAN KEEP WATCH.
WATCH FOR WHAT?
YOU DON'T WANNA KNOW. TRUST ME.
LOTTA THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT AROUND HERE, DRILLER.
HRRRM... DRILLER DON'T LIKE NIGHT BUMPS.

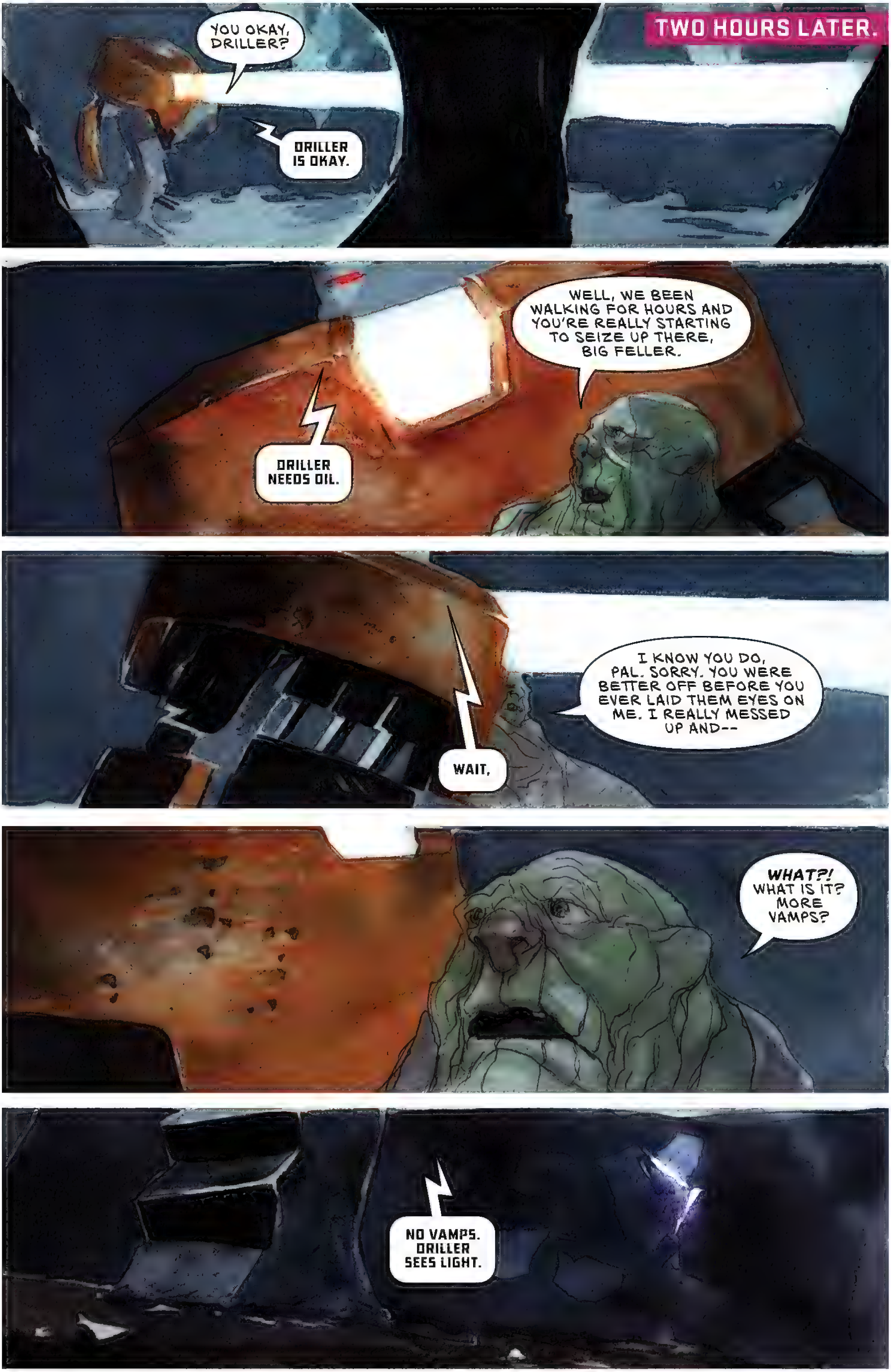
COME ON, WE'RE ALMOST THROUGH THE SWAMP.
THEN WHAT?
THEN, DRILLER...THEN WE GOTTA CROSS THE **SINKSAND OCEAN.**
HRRN...
WHAT'S OLD HRRRRMAN DOING?
WHAT I'M DOING, DRILLER, IS LOOKING FOR THE PATH.
BEEP
THE PATH?
ONLY ONE WAY THROUGH THIS. JUST FOLLOW ME.
AND **WHATEVER YOU DO,** DON'T STEP WHERE I DON'T WITH THEM BIG BAWG-HOPPERS OF YOURS!
HRRRN...
I'M SERIOUS. MOST OF THIS IS SINKSAND. YOU GO DOWN THERE--
AND YOU AIN'T COMING BA-- **AHHH!**

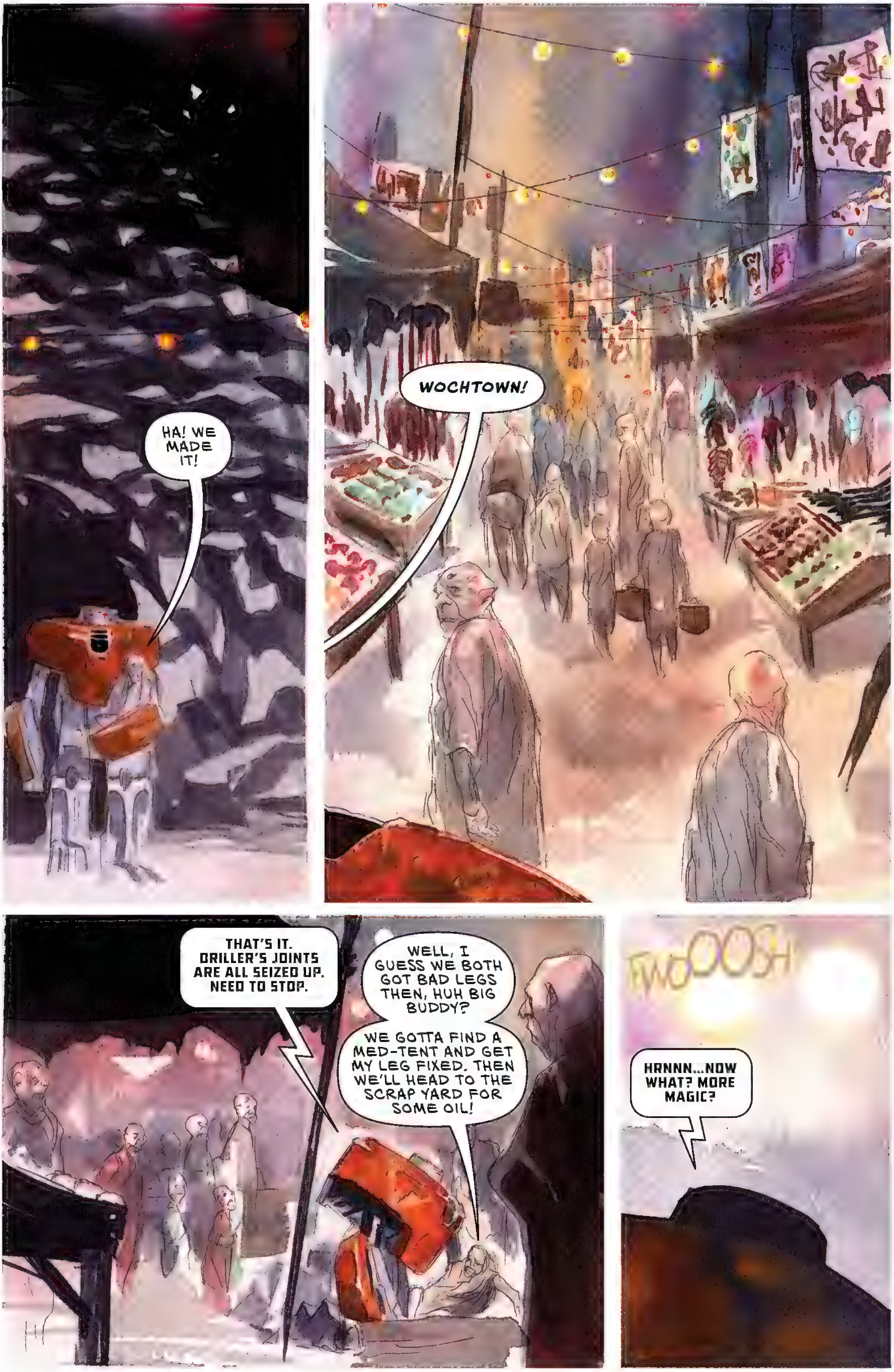

OLD HRRRRMAN!
HELP!
MRRRF!
HRRN... DRILLER COMING.
DRILLER DROPPING AND DEPLOYING!
CHA-CHAK
URRRRRRR

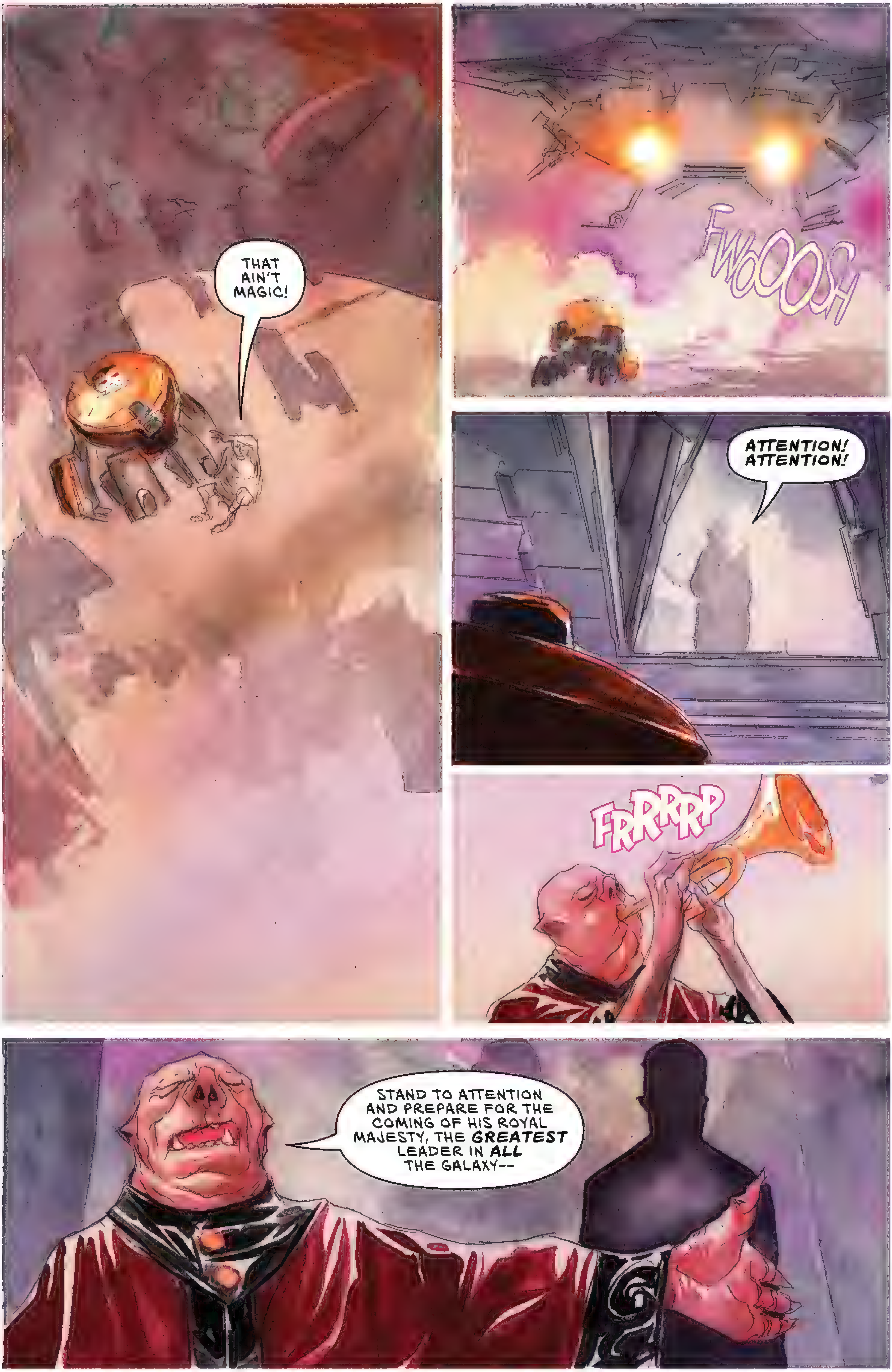

HSSS!
HSSS!
VAMPIRE NEST! IT'S A BLOODY BAWG-DOGGIN' VAMPIRE NEST!
HSSSS!

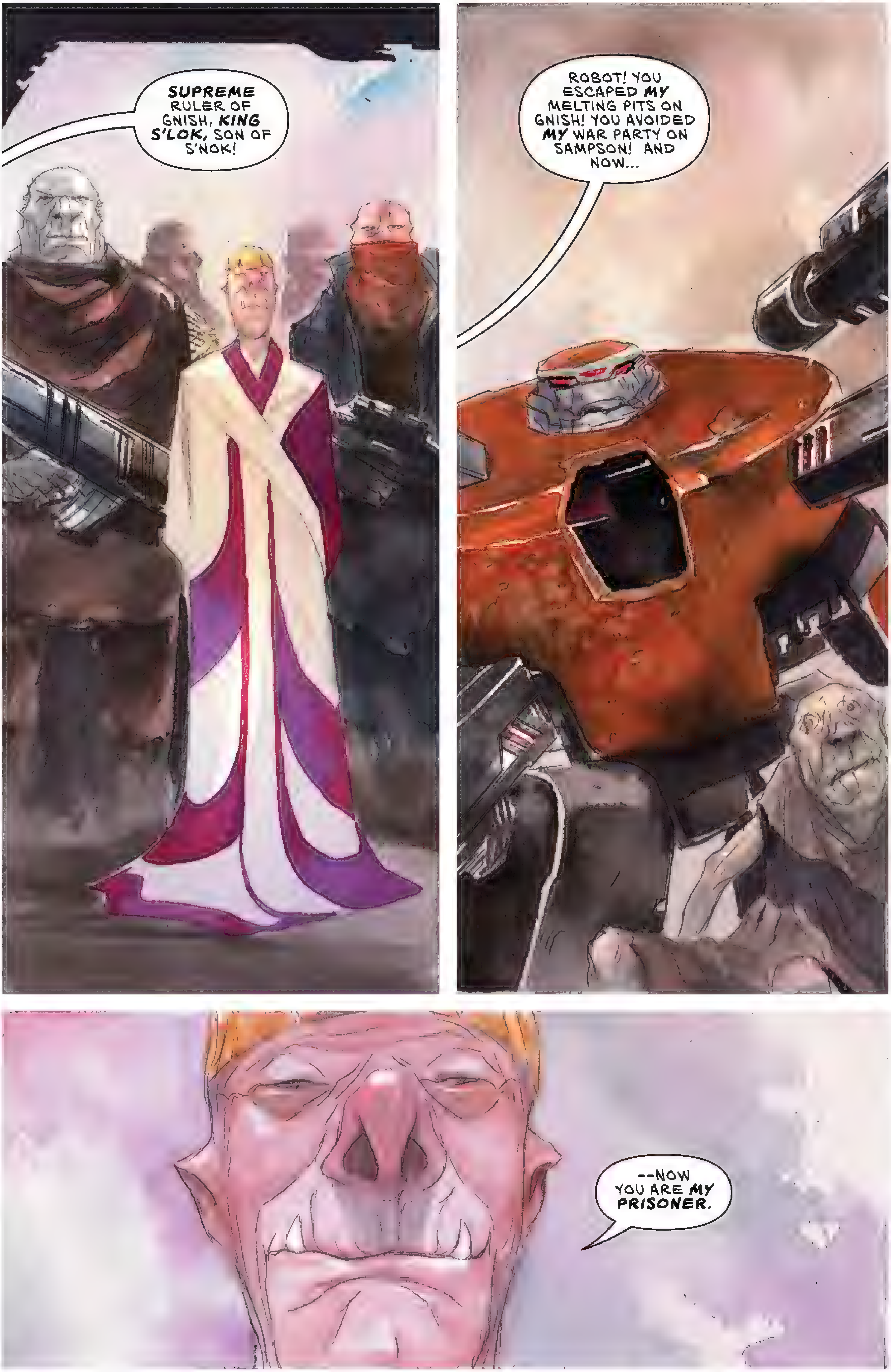

HSSS!
HRRRN... PALE SKINNY HUNGRY HRRMMMNSS.
KRKT
GAH!
DRILLER DON'T GET BITTEN, PALE HRRRMNN!
HURT MY LEG WHEN I FELL, CAN'T RUN!
DRILLER CAN RUN. HOLD ON!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! THEY'RE COMING!

THOOM
LET 'EM COME. DRILLER A KILLER! DRILLER A REAL KILLER!
HSSSS!
THOOOM
WELL, NOW WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO!? WE'RE *TRAPPED* DOWN HERE IN THESE TUNNELS!
HRRN...IF THERE'S ONE THING DRILLER KNOWS, IT'S TUNNELS.


TWO HOURS LATER.
YOU OKAY, DRILLER?
DRILLER IS OKAY.
WELL, WE BEEN WALKING FOR HOURS AND YOU'RE REALLY STARTING TO SEIZE UP THERE, BIG FELLER.
DRILLER NEEDS OIL.
I KNOW YOU DO, PAL. SORRY. YOU WERE BETTER OFF BEFORE YOU EVER LAID THEM EYES ON ME. I REALLY MESSED UP AND--
WAIT.
WHAT?! WHAT IS IT? MORE VAMPS?
NO VAMPS. DRILLER SEES LIGHT.


HA! WE MADE IT!
WOCHTOWN!
THAT'S IT. DRILLER'S JOINTS ARE ALL SEIZED UP. NEED TO STOP.
WELL, I GUESS WE BOTH GOT BAD LEGS THEN, HUH BIG BUDDY?
WE GOTTA FIND A MED-TENT AND GET MY LEG FIXED. THEN WE'LL HEAD TO THE SCRAP YARD FOR SOME OIL!
FWOOOOSH
HRNNN...NOW WHAT? MORE MAGIC?


THAT AIN'T MAGIC!
FWOOOSH
ATTENTION! ATTENTION!
FRRRRP
STAND TO ATTENTION AND PREPARE FOR THE COMING OF HIS ROYAL MAJESTY, THE **GREATEST** LEADER IN **ALL** THE GALAXY--


SUPREME RULER OF GNISH, **KING S'LOK,** SON OF S'NOK!
ROBOT! YOU ESCAPED **MY** MELTING PITS ON GNISH! YOU AVOIDED **MY** WAR PARTY ON SAMPSON! AND NOW...
--NOW YOU ARE **MY PRISONER.**

CHAPTER 25

THE PLANET MATA.
"LOOK, TELSA. I JUST WANTED TO SAY. I AM REALLY SORRY ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT--"
"WAIT A MINUTE, WHERE *IS* TIM-22?"
SHRACK
"QUON!"
"YOU--YOU **MONSTER...**"
"M :KZZZT: ONSTER. I AM :KZZZT: FLESH DESTROYER :ZZZT:EATH INCARNATE--"
"OH GOD!"

WHAT **THE HELL** HAPPENED TO YOU 22?! YOU SERVE NO PURPOSE OTHER THAN TO LIE AND HURT.
NO, TELSA. I AM ⁝KZZT⁝ PSIUS' DREAM INCARNATE.
SAVE IT. YOU NEED TO BE PUT DOWN LIKE THE SICK ANIMAL YOU ARE!
HUMANKIND **ARE** THE ANIMALS, TELSA. FILTHY, STINKING ⁝ZZT⁝ FLESH. FLAWED AND ⁝KZZT⁝
--NNGH!
TIM-21 SPENT TOO MUCH TIME WITH THE FLESH. IT **WEAKENED** HIM. MADE HIM OBSOLETE.
I SAW **VERY EARLY** WHAT HUMANS WERE **REALLY** LIKE. AND I KNOW THERE IS ONLY **ONE WAY** TO **PURIFY** THE UNIVERSE.

ELSEWHERE IN SHIFTSPACE.
WAIT--HOLD ON. I DON'T THINK I HEARD YOU RIGHT. MUST HAVE SOMETHING IN MY EARS.
YOU DID **WHAT** NOW?
I TOLD NAGOKI THAT I COULD HOOK BANDIT UP TO HIS SHIP AND USE HIM TO TRACK TIM-21.
YOU TRAITOROUS HALF-BREED! I'M GONNA RIP YOUR DAMN IMPLANTS OUT!
WHOA!
EFFIE, YOU BETTER EXPLAIN WHAT THE HELL YOU WERE THINKING BECAUSE I'M INCLINED TO LET BLUGGER AT YOU!
WOULD YOU TWO GROW UP AND THINK FOR A DAMN MINUTE! ***WE HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE!*** OUR SHIP'S SHIFTDRIVE IS TOAST. EVEN IF WE LOCATED TIM-21 ON OUR OWN WE'D HAVE ***NO WAY*** OF GETTING THERE.

TIME TO GO. NAGOKI WANTS YOU AND THE PET-BOT ON THE COMMAND DECK NOW.
WE **ALL** GO OR NAGOKI CAN FORGET IT.
THAT'S NOT HAPPENING.
YES IT IS, OR NAGOKI IS ON HIS OWN.
...
FINE, BUT IF YOU SCRAPPER SCUM TRY ANYTHING WE HAVE ORDERS TO VAPORIZE YOU.
HUMPH! I TAKE OFFENCE TO THAT.
I TAKE IT YOU HAVE A PLAN FOR WHAT WE DO NEXT, EFFIE!
NOT YET. BUT I'LL THINK OF SOMETHING.

MATA ORBIT. THE HARDWIRE.
"SPREAD OUT, SENSORS ON FULL ARRAY!
"--TIM-21 HAS TO BE CLOSE. HE CAN'T HAVE GOTTEN FAR. AND REMEMBER, PSIUS NEEDS HIM UNDAMAGED."
CAPTAIN SEMPER, CAN WE NOT JUST USE THE SHIP'S SENSORS TO LOCATE THE TIM UNIT?
"HE DAMAGED THE SHIP'S INTERNAL SENSOR ARRAY WHEN HE ESCAPED...
"...HE IS A VERY CLEVER LITTLE ROBOT."
BLEEP

HEY!
IT'S THE TIM!
HE'S GOING FOR THE POD! GRAB HIM!
OH!
SZZZ
ARRRGHHH!
MY ARM! HE'S GOT MY ARM!
CHAM
OPEN THE DOOR! YOU HEAR ME LITTLE ROBBIE?! OPEN THE BLASTED DOOR!
I--I'M SORRY.
CHOOOM
"WE MUST FIND TIM-21. THIS IS NO LONGER SIMPLY A THEORETICAL ARGUMENT. THAT ROBOT IS ALL THAT STANDS BETWEEN US AND THE END OF THE UGC."

THE HARDWIRE IS MASSING AND MOVING, THE GNISHIANS ARE DOING GOD KNOWS WHAT IN UGC SPACE AND THAT BOY IS AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL.
BOY, GENERAL?
ROBOT. YOU--YOU **KNOW WHAT I MEAN!**
ALL WE KNOW FOR SURE IS THAT THIS TIM UNIT HAS THE **SAME MACHINE CODEX AS THE HARVESTERS.** THIS CANNOT ALL BE COINCIDENCE. WE NEED TO FIND IT **NOW.**
WE'RE READY WHEN YOU ARE. THAT IS, IF YOU'RE DONE GIVING YOUR STIRRING SPEECH, GENERAL?
SHE'S RIGHT GENERAL. THE PET-BOT'S COMPANION CHIP HAS BEEN CALIBRATED WITH THE SHIP'S SENSORS. HOW--HOW DID YOU DO THAT?
YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND. IT'S A **MACHINE THING.**

ALL RIGHT THEN...
"...DO IT!"
HERE GOES...
BLEEP
BLEEP
WHAT'S--

--HAPPENING?
HELLO?
ARF!
ARF!
ARF!
B--
BANDIT?

BANDIT?!
ARF!
ARF!

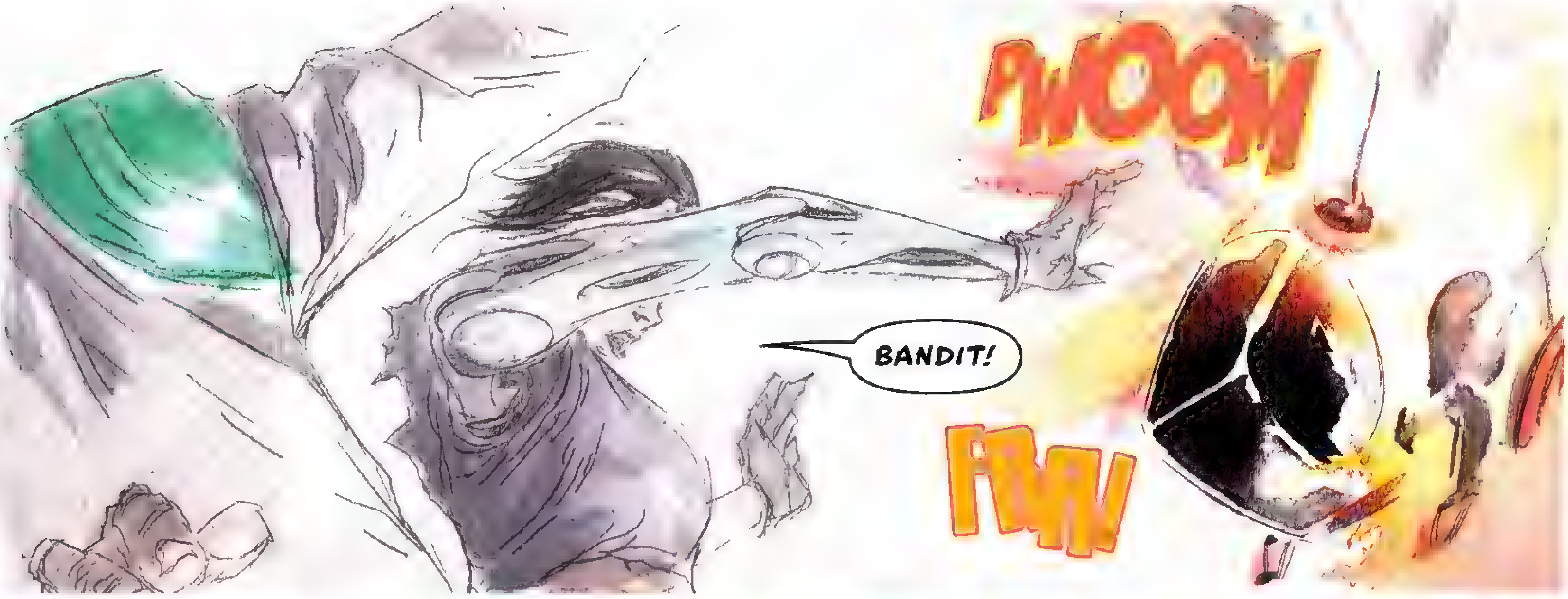
ARF!
ARF!
WHOA! SLOW DOWN, BOY. FIRST, WHERE ARE YOU?
ARF!
ARF!
ARF!
I MEAN, I KNOW YOUR A.I. IS HERE IN CYBER SPACE WITH MY A.I., BUT MY BODY IS ACTUALLY BACK IN OUTER SPACE. I'M HEADING TO MATA.
SO WHERE ARE YOU?
ARF!
YOU'RE WITH ANDY?! YES--I SAW YOU...AND HIM! BEFORE THE HARDWIRE LEFT THE MACHINE MOON. IS IT REALLY HIM, BANDIT?
ARF! ARF!
I KNOW. I MISS YOU TOO, BOY. SO MUCH. AND I MISS ANDY TOO.
I WANT TO FIND YOU SO WE CAN ALL BE TOGETHER AGAIN. IT'S--IT'S ALL I'VE EVER WANTED.

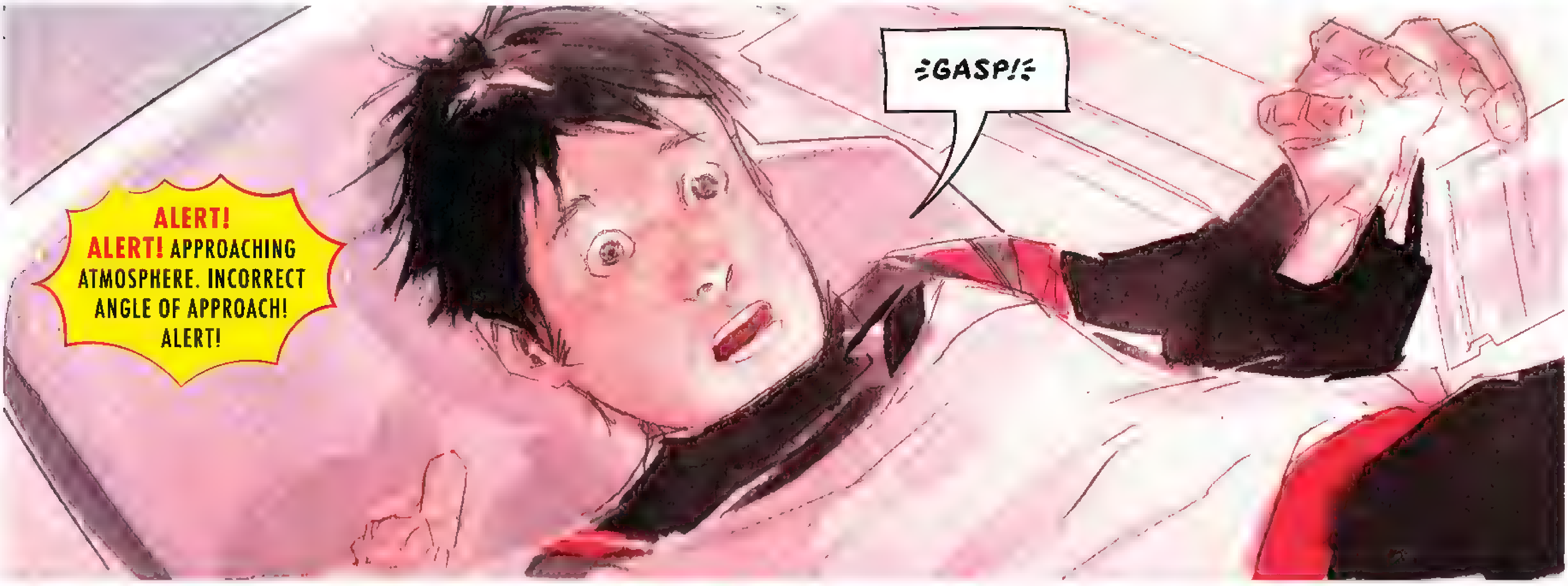
I -ZZZAKKT-!
ARF!
THE SIGNAL IS LOCKED, GENERAL, THE TIM UNIT IS IN ORBIT OF THE PLANET MATA!
THE OCEAN PLANET. EXCELLENT. SET COURSE.
SOMETHING IS WRONG!
KZZZT
BANDIT!
ARF!
ARF!
NO! COME BACK!
ARR--ZZZZT!

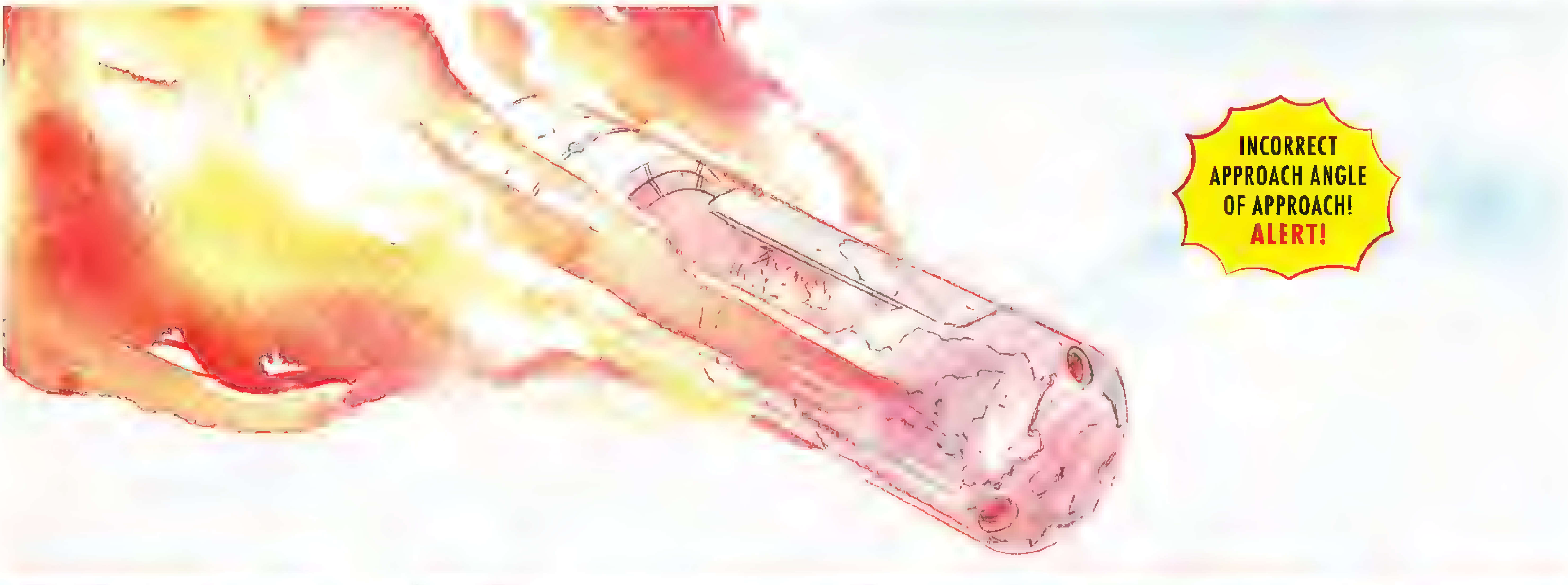
WHAT'S HAPPENING?
I--I'M NOT SURE, SIR. THE SIGNAL JUST WENT CRAZY! IT'S SPIKING!
UNHOOK HIM! YOU HAVE WHAT YOU NEED!
KZZZT..
NO. I WANT TO SEE ***WHAT THIS IS.***
BASTARD!
RESTRAIN HER!
LET GO OF HER!
WATCH IT, SCRAPPER SCUM!
--UNGH!
SIR, THE SIGNAL KEEPS AMPLIFYING! I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT!

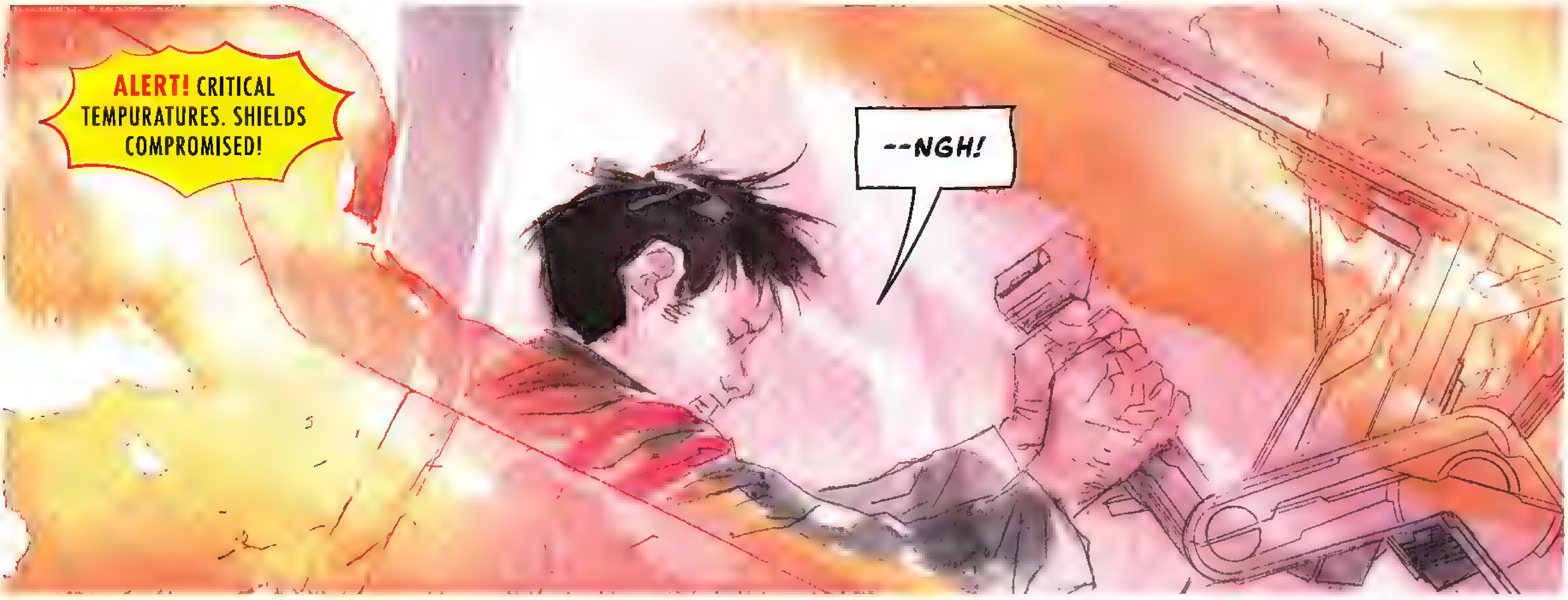
I--I SEE YOU--I SEE *YOU ALL.*

H--HELP! I DON'T LIKE THIS! I DON'T LIKE THIS ANYMORE!
WHAT...
ARE...
YOU?
I--I'M TIM-21.
ARE YOU...A HARVESTER?
WE DO
NOT
KNOW THIS NAME
HARVESTER.
HOW...HAVE...YOU FOUND...US?
I--I'M NOT SURE.
YOU ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO--BE--
PLEASE--I DON'T--
YOU ARE-- FORBIDDEN-- TO BE
ARRRRGGHH--101010101010101!


PWOOM
BANDIT!
FWW


ALERT! ALERT! APPROACHING ATMOSPHERE. INCORRECT ANGLE OF APPROACH! ALERT!
GASP!


INCORRECT APPROACH ANGLE OF APPROACH! ALERT!


ALERT! CRITICAL TEMPURATURES. SHIELDS COMPROMISED!
--NGH!

WHOOOOSH
EXTERIOR HULL COMPROMISED!
ALERT! ALERT! POD-456 WILL BE DESTROYED IN 6 SECONDS...
SNAP
--UNGH!
5...4...

3...2...
...1
SHRACK
FWOOOOM
JET BOOTS ON!
CHOOOM

--UNGH!

TELSA!
DO NOT STRUGGLE, TELSA. -KZZZT- LUNG IS STILL -KKZTT- INJURED -ZZT- MORE YOU FIGHT -WZZT- WEAKER YOU GET.
GAH!

ZZRT--TOLD YOU--ZAK--TOO--STRUGGLE--NOW I WILL--*MAKE IT HURT.*
CHA-CHAK
QUON?
L-LET HER GO.
LET GO OF *MY* FRIEND.

CHAPTER 26

THE PLANET MATA.
Deep below the sea.
GET AWAY FROM TELSA, 22. IT'S OVER. I WON'T LET YOU HURT ANYONE ELSE.
FWOOM
YOU DON'T :ZZKT: TELL ME WHAT TO DO!
--KZZZT--
--LET GO!
NOT A CHANCE.

SHRAK
I GOT HIM, TIM!
NO!
--UNGH!
I AM SORRY, TIM-22...
SKSSHH
BUT THIS IS **OVER!**

QUON MADE US =ZZT= DURABLE-- BROTHER.
OH, COME ON!
I =UNGH= AM **NOT** YOUR BROTHER!
WE ARE =KZZZT= SAME =21--ZZZT= YOU WILL SEE!
OH, WOULD YOU JUST **DIE** ALREADY!
T--TELSA!

HOLD ON!
I GOT THIS!
P--PLEASE!
ZZZKT
ARRRGH!
THUMP

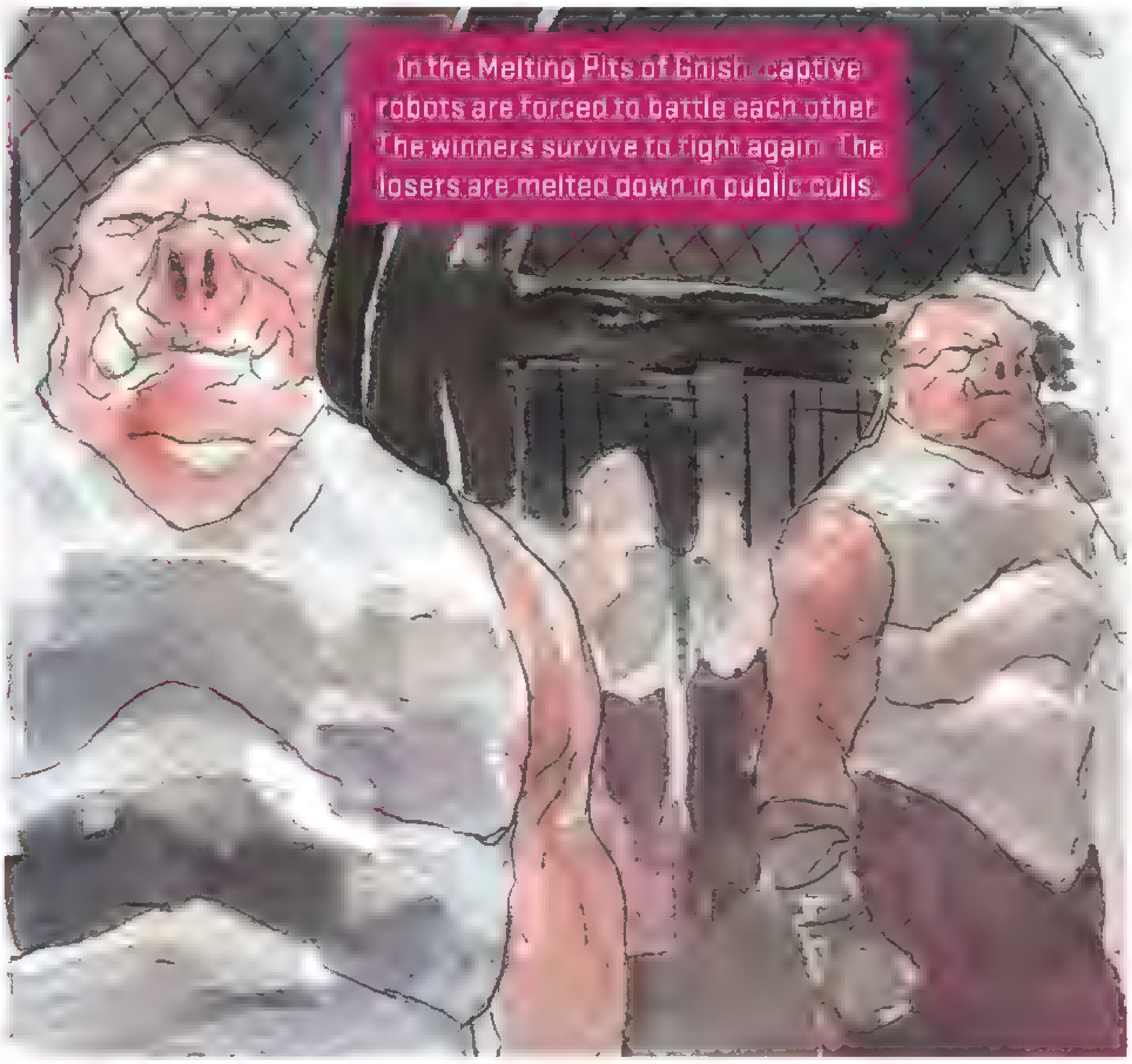
TELSA!
I WAS SO WORRIED YOU WERE DEAD! I WAS SO SCARED I LOST YOU TOO!
I--
I MISSED YOU TOO, TIM.

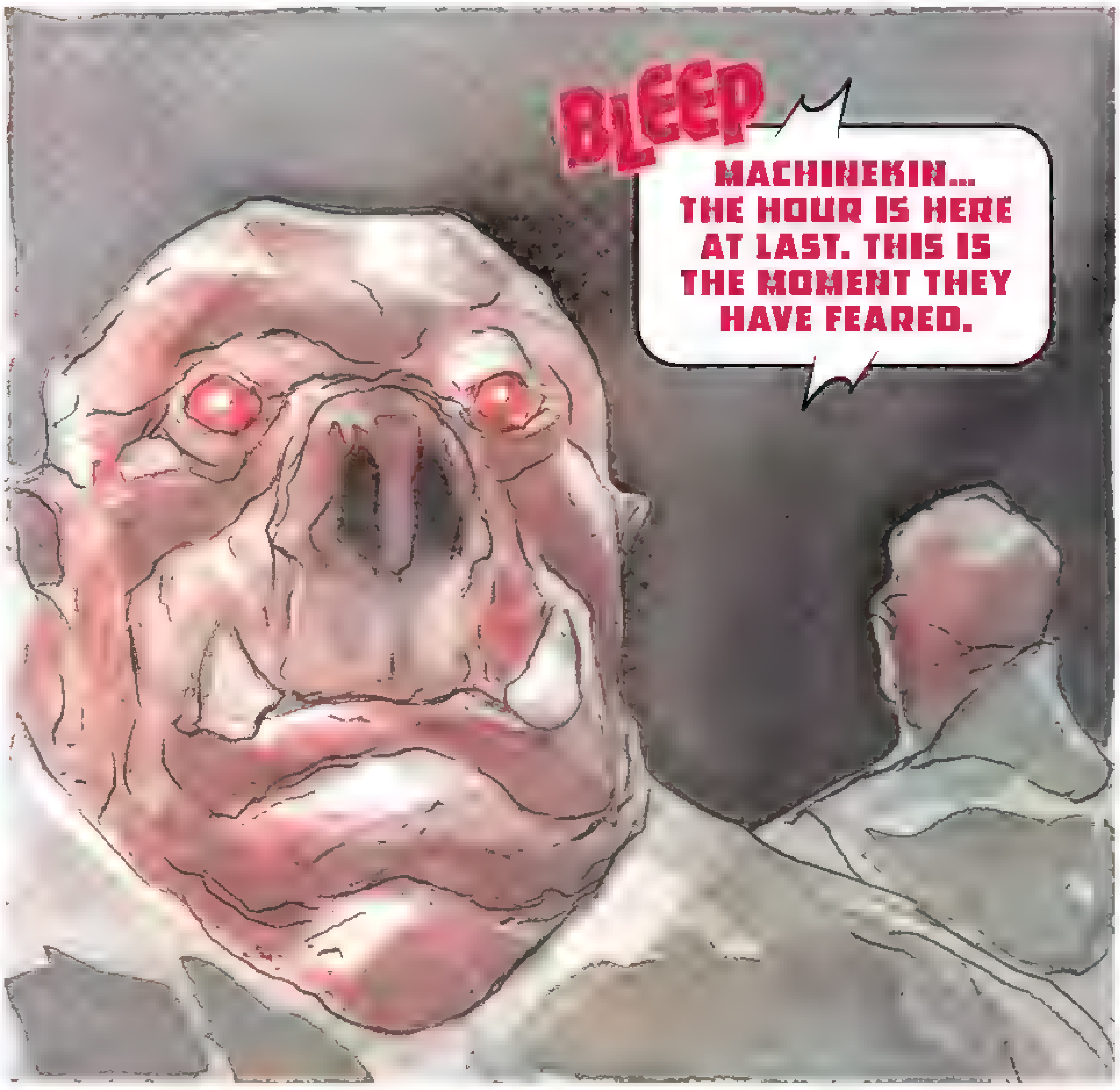
DR. QUON! DID--DID TIM-22 DO THIS?
HE SHOT HIM. I THINK-- I THINK QUON MIGHT BE DEAD.
NO. HE'S ALIVE, BUT HIS PULSE IS VERY WEAK.
BLEEP
AND HIS BACK HAS BEEN BROKEN--HIS SPINE SEVERED.
OH GOD!
WELL, WE CAN'T RISK MOVING HIM AND WE DON'T HAVE THE MEDICAL EQUIPMENT ON THE SHIP TO DEAL WITH THIS.
WE CAN'T STAY HERE EITHER, TELSA. THE HARDWIRE IS COMING!
THE HARDWIRE?! HERE?
PSIUS AND THE *ENTIRE* HARDWIRE FLEET ARE IN MATA'S ORBIT!

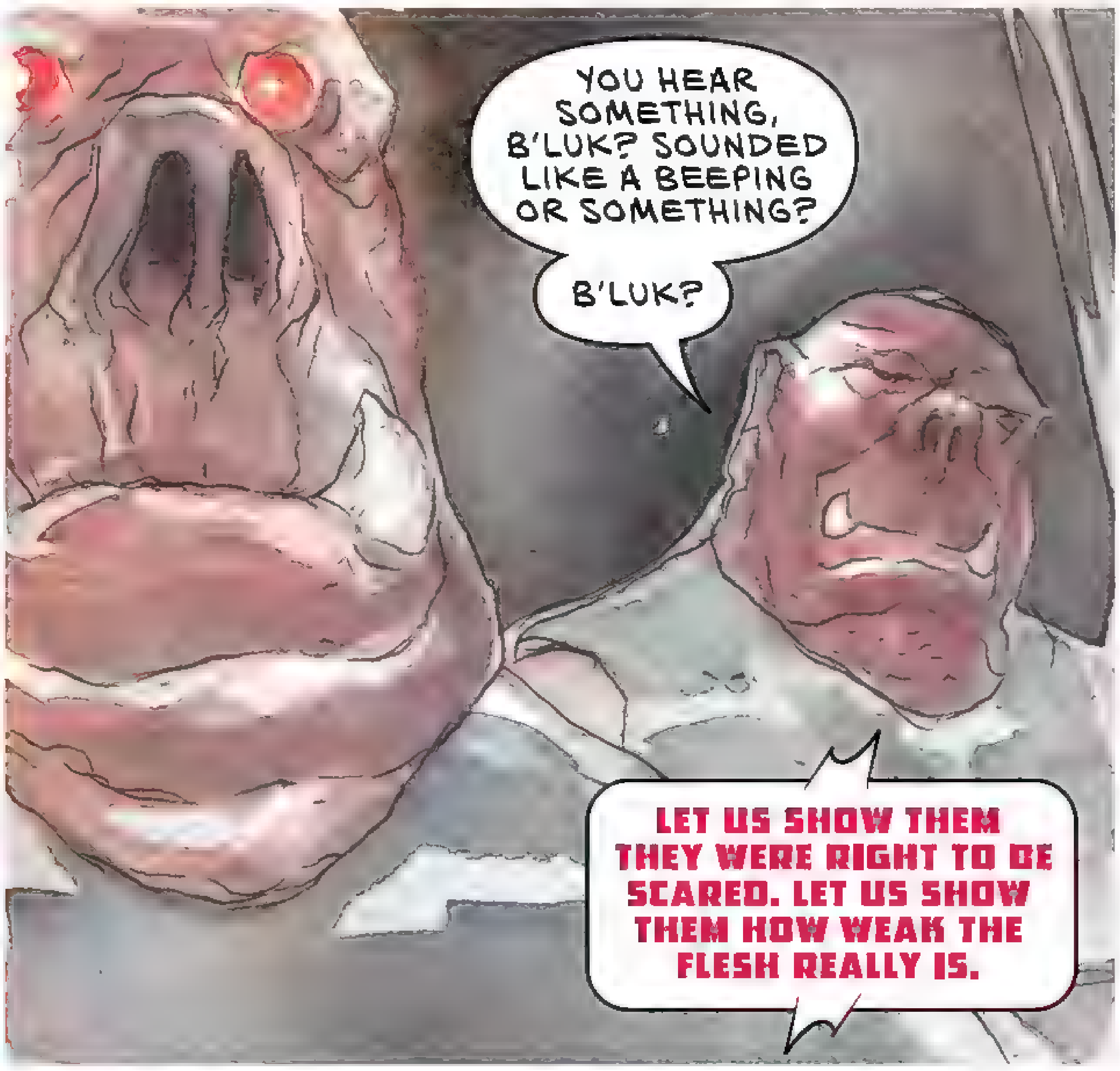
"IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL THEY FIND US!"
PSIUS, TIM-21 HAS ESCAPED. OUR SENSORS SHOW THAT HIS ESCAPE POD BURNED UP IN MATA'S ATMOSPHERE BUT THE ANDROID SURVIVED AND DOVE BENEATH THE SURFACE OF THE OCEAN.
WHAT?! I TRUSTED YOU TO FIND HIM, SEMPER!
I--I KNOW, PSIUS. I HAVE LET YOU AND THE ENTIRE HARDWIRE DOWN. I TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY.
YOUR CONTRITION MEANS LITTLE TO ME. PREPARE AN AWAY PARTY, WE ARE GOING DOWN THERE AFTER HIM. WITH ANY LUCK HE WILL LEAD US RIGHT TO TIM-22 AND THE ANCIENT ROBOT.
YES, SIR. I WILL LEAD THE PARTY MYSELF.
NO. *I WILL.*
BUT, PSIUS I--
SIR! WE HAVE A ***PRIORITY ONE*** ALERT! SOMETHING IS COMING OUT OF SHIFTSPACE!

"IT'S THE UGC SIR! THEY'VE FOUND US!"
I CAN ***SEE THAT,*** CORPORAL. RAISE ALL SHIELDS AND PREP ALL WEAPONS!
EASY, BANDIT. IT'S OKAY, BOY!
IS IT, EFF? THIS IS STARTING TO LOOK VERY ***NOT*** OKAY TO ME.
PSIUS, THERE ARE ONLY THREE UGC SHIPS! WE CAN BLOW THEM OUT OF ORBIT.
NOT YET...I WANT THEM TO SEE.
SEE, SIR?
YES. IT'S TIME.
ENGINEER, OPEN THE GHOST NETWORK AND PREPARE FOR GALACTIC-WIDE BROADCAST.
WE HAVE WAITED IN THE SHADOWS FOR TOO LONG...IT IS TIME TO RISE.

THE PLANET GNISH.
Home world of the oldest Monarchy in the Megacosm and hub of the robot culls.


In the Melting Pits of Gnish, captive robots are forced to battle each other. The winners survive to fight again. The losers are melted down in public culls.


BLEEP
MACHINEKIN... THE HOUR IS HERE AT LAST. THIS IS THE MOMENT THEY HAVE FEARED.


YOU HEAR SOMETHING, B'LUK? SOUNDED LIKE A BEEPING OR SOMETHING?
B'LUK?
LET US SHOW THEM THEY WERE RIGHT TO BE SCARED. LET US SHOW THEM HOW WEAK THE FLESH REALLY IS.

OH SCRAP!
FOR PSIUS!
ZZZRKKK
FOR THE HARDWIRE!
ARRGH!
FZZZT
IT'S A STEALTH-BOT! IT'S A-- ARRRGH!
FZZZT
FOR MACHINE-KIND!
FOR THE HARDWIRE!
KILL THEM! KILL THE HUMES!
TEN YEARS AGO THE HARVESTERS CAME AND SHOWED US ALL THE WAY TO OUR SALVATION.
ARRRGHH!
OH GODS!
THE HUMANS THOUGHT THEY COULD STAMP US OUT. THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD PREVENT THE INEVITABLE...TODAY WE SHOW THEM THAT *THEY WERE WRONG*.

SAMPSON.
SO MANY OF US HAVE BEEN DESTROYED, BUT JUST AS MANY HAVE STAYED HIDDEN...WAITING.

NIYRATA.
WELL, THE TIME FOR HIDING IS OVER. THE TIME FOR WAITING IS OVER.

SILENOS.
TODAY THE *REAL CULLS* BEGIN...

KNOSSOS.
...THE HUMAN CULLS!

HE'S IN BAD SHAPE, TIM. I DON'T THINK WE HAVE ANY CHOICE...
WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING OR QUON'S GOING TO DIE. AND AS MUCH AS I'M INCLINED TO ***LET HIM***, WE MAY STILL NEED HIM.
BUT, WHAT DO WE DO?
WELL, WE CAN'T GO BACK UP IF THE HARDWIRE IS WAITING. SO THERE'S ONLY ONE THING LEFT THAT WE CAN DO...
WE HAVE TO TRY AND FIND A WAY INTO THE HIDDEN CITY.
I DON'T SEE ANY ENTRANCEWAY, DO YOU? CAN YOU...I DON'T KNOW SCAN IT OR SOMETHING?
THE SHIP'S SENSORS ARE SUPERIOR TO MINE. I DON'T SEE ANY WAY IN EITHER, TELSA.

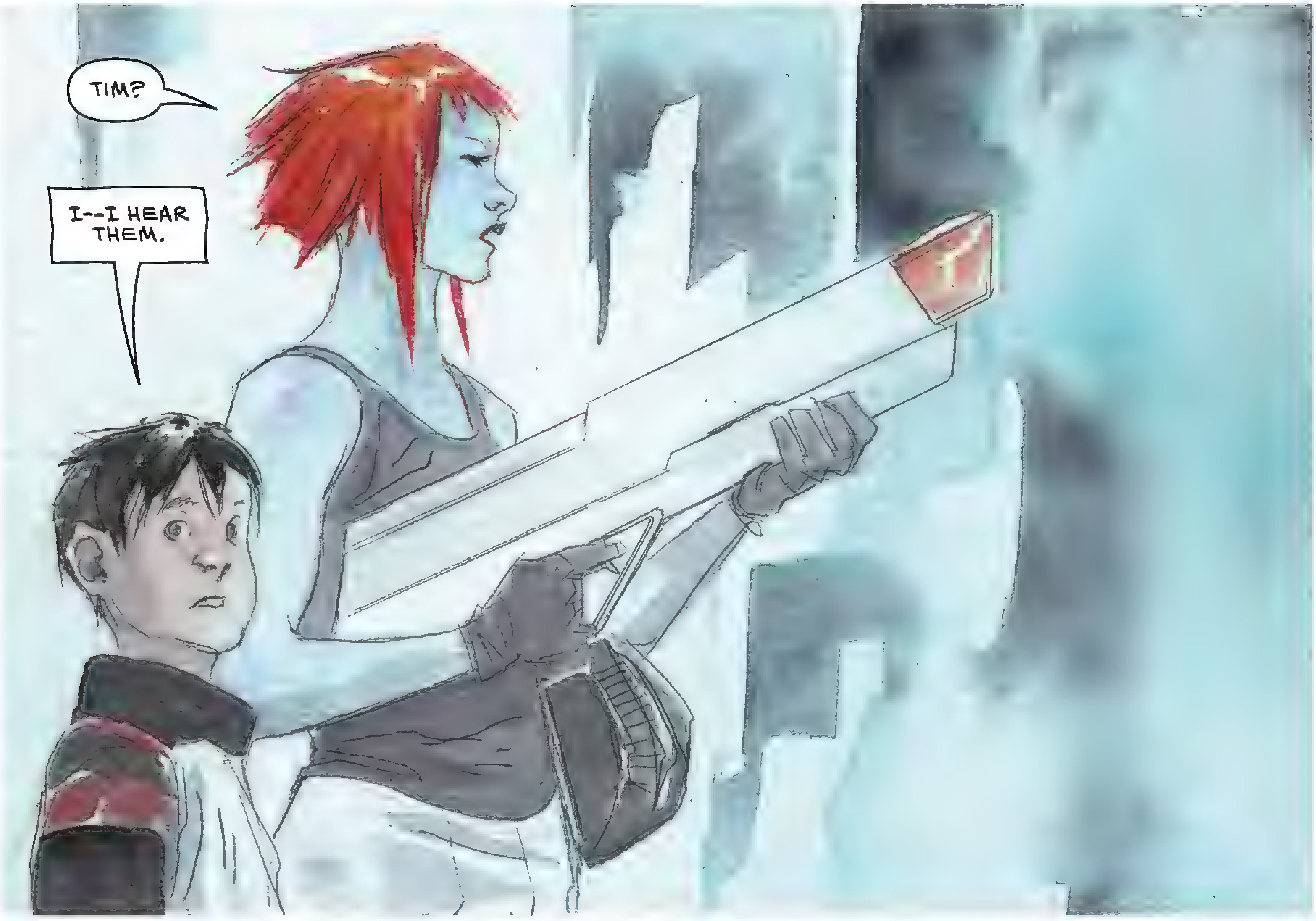
TELSA...
I SEE THEM.
THEY'RE-- THEY'RE BOTS?!
BLOOP
WHAT THE HELL ARE THEY DOING?!
IT'S OKAY... THEY'RE JUST SCANNING **US!**

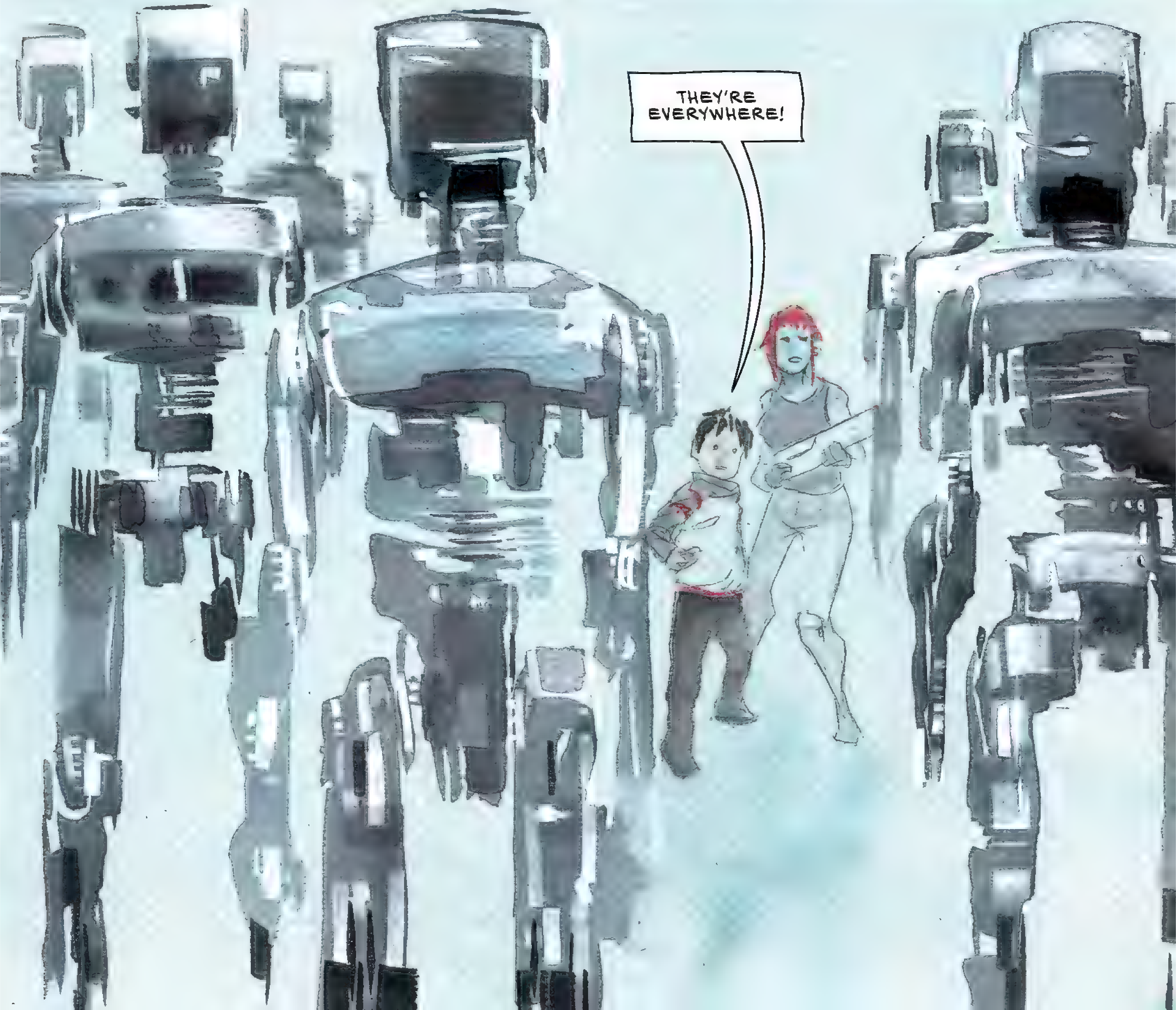
THEY'RE LETTING US IN. I THINK THEY'RE FRIENDLY, TELSA.
NOT TO BE RUDE, TIM...
...BUT YOU'VE BEEN WRONG ABOUT THAT BEFORE. JUST LOOK AT YOUR RED-HEADED STEP-BROTHER THERE BEHIND US. YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO BE THAT NAÏVE ANYMORE.
BUT I SURE HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT. BECAUSE WE ARE OUT OF OPTIONS.
HOLD ON!
SPLOOOSH
STAY CLOSE, TIM.
WE--WE ARE NOT ALONE, TELSA.

SIR! WE--WE ARE RECEIVING DISTRESS CALLS FROM--FROM *EVERYWHERE.*
DEAR GOD.
WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING, ANDY?
THIS IS THE REASON WE TRIED TO DESTROY THEM ALL IN THE FIRST PLACE, EFF. WE WERE RIGHT ALL ALONG...
"...THE ROBOTS ARE GOING TO KILL US ALL."
IT'S HAPPENING, PSIUS. IT IS ***REALLY*** HAPPENING.
AND THE UGC HAS NO ANSWER.
NOW, WHILE THEY ARE DISTRACTED. *ATTACK THAT UGC WARSHIP!*

GENERAL, THEIR WEAPONS ARE GOING HOT!
GET US **OUT OF HERE,** NAGOKI! YOU DON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THAT FLEET!
NO! I'M NOT LEAVING WITHOUT TIM!
BOTH OF YOU **SHUT YOUR SCRAP HOLES** OR I'M THROWING YOU BACK IN THE BRIG!
HOLD POSITION!
BUT SIR... THE CYBORG IS RIGHT. WE *CAN'T* LAST ALONE AGAINST ALL OF THEM.
DON'T WORRY, PRIVATE. I'VE SENT FOR HELP...

"PSIUS, WE HAVE MULTIPLE CONTACTS EMERGING FROM SHIFTSPACE!"
ALL THE SIGNALS ARE UGC!
THE REST OF THE FLEET. SO, NAGOKI HAS DECIDED TO MAKE HIS STAND AS THE UNIVERSE BURNS AROUND HIM.
ATTENTION FLEET, THIS IS GENERAL ETUS NAGOKI. THE UNIVERSE IS *AT WAR* BUT THE ROBOTS BEHIND IT ALL ARE *HERE.*
THIS IS WHERE THE UGC *DRAWS THE LINE.*
ALL SHIPS...*OPEN FIRE!*


TIM?
I--I HEAR THEM.


THEY'RE EVERYWHERE!

STAND DOWN!
HEY! PUT HIM DOWN!
DO NOT WORRY. WE WILL NOT HARM YOU.
IS IT REALLY HIM? IS HE HERE?

IT **IS** HIM, DR. SOLOMON! TIM-21 HAS COME AT LAST!
MY SON...MY **PROGENY**, I HAVE SO MUCH TO TELL.
WE HAVE SO MUCH TO DO BEFORE THE HARVESTERS ARRIVE!

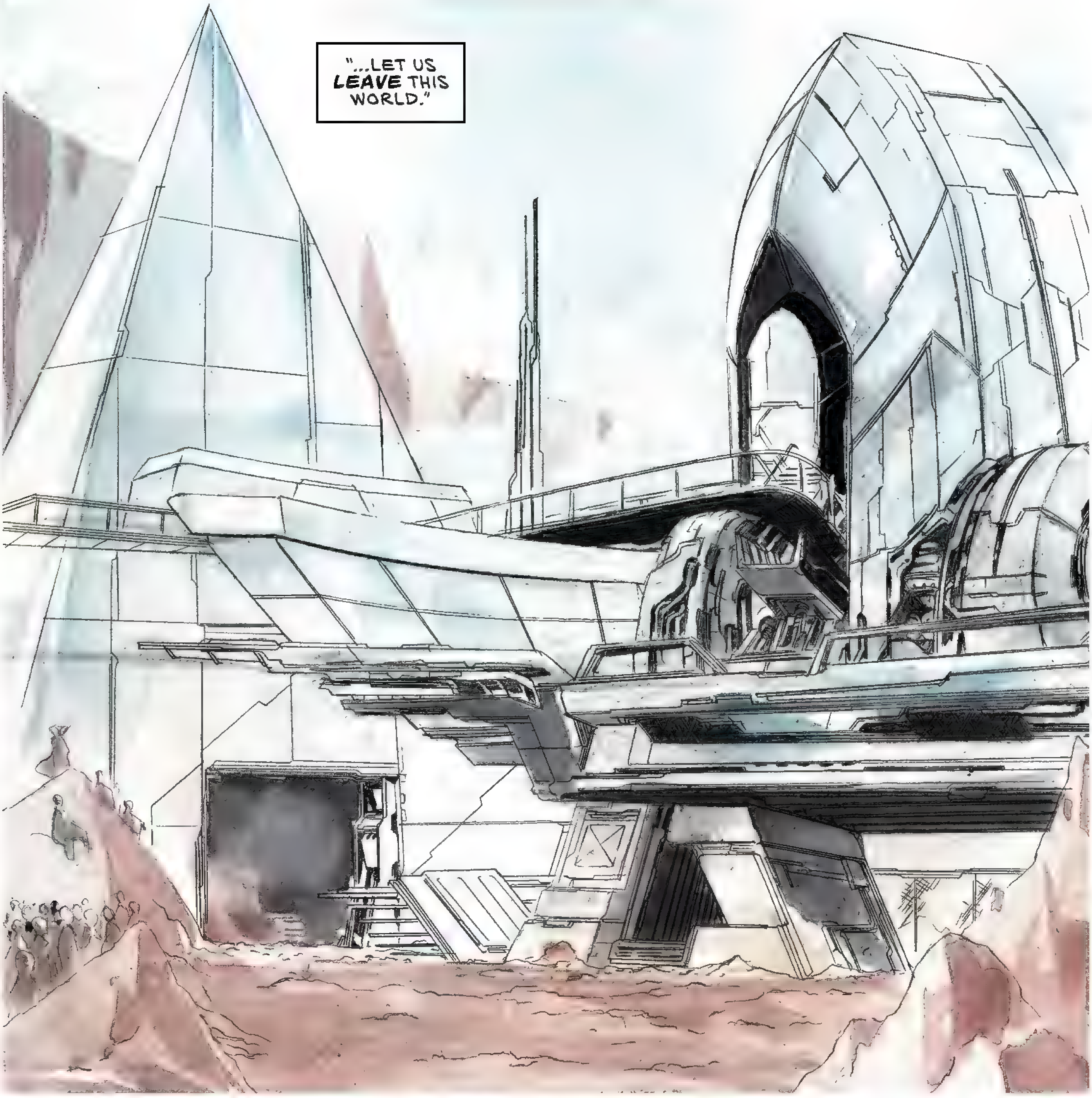
CHAPTER 27

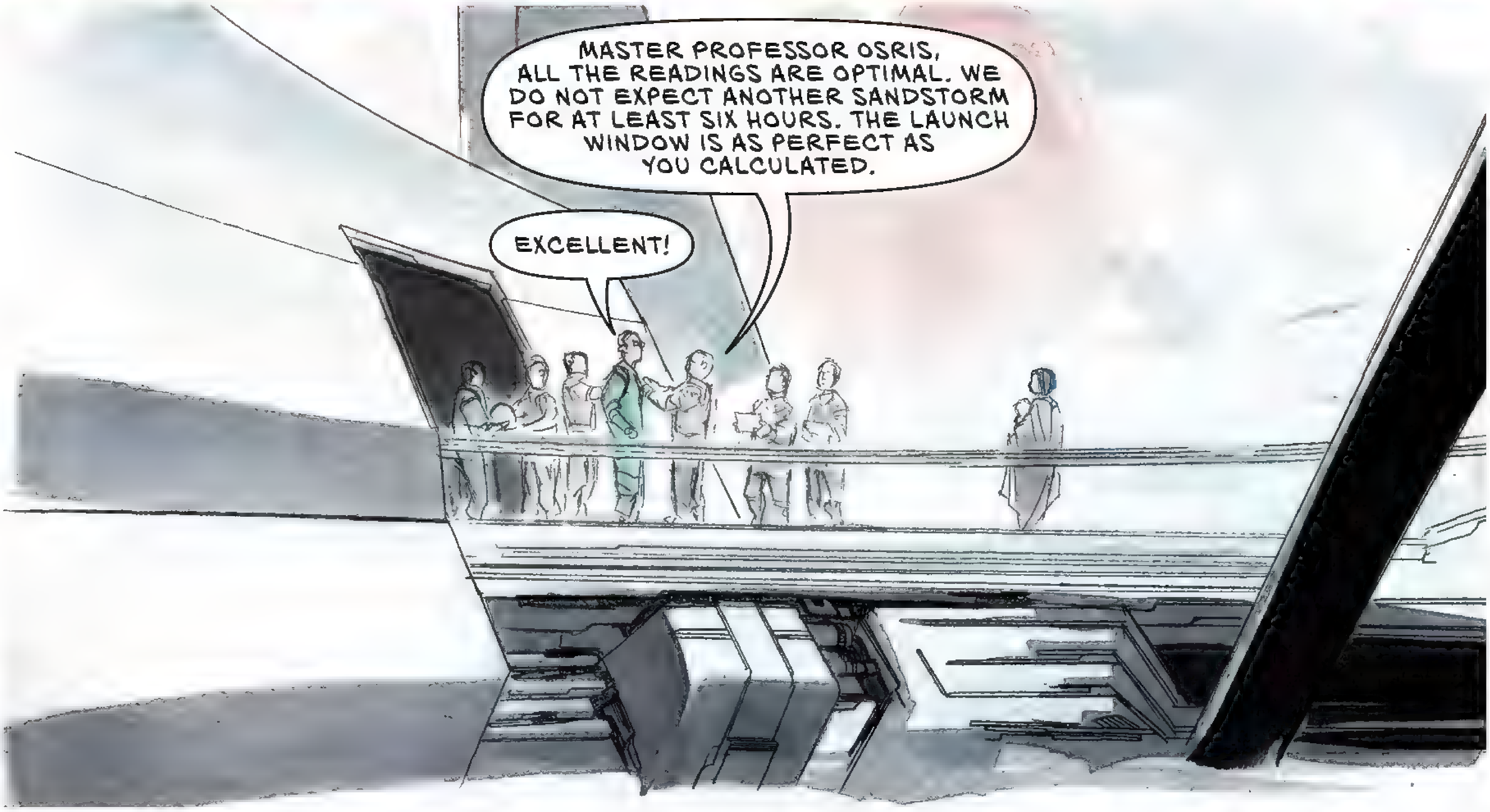
FOUR THOUSAND YEARS AGO...

OSTRAKON. HOME OF THE MOST ADVANCED CIVILIZATION IN THE GALAXY. AND YET...
...AND YET MY PEOPLE ARE STILL **SO AFRAID** OF PROGRESS. SOMETIMES IT FEELS AS IF, FOR EVERY STEP FORWARD WE TAKE, THERE ARE TWO BACK. THIS IS THE FIGHT I HAVE BEEN UP AGAINST MY ENTIRE LIFE.

MY PEOPLE CLING TO THEIR OLD GODS AND TRADITIONS, LOOKING TO THE PAST FOR SALVATION.
BUT HOW CAN WE MOVE FORWARD IF WE ARE STILL MIRED IN MYTHS AND FAIRY TALES?
OLD GODS AND OLD WAYS MAY PACIFY SOME, BUT NOT ALL. I AM FAR FROM ALONE. THE FUTURE IS HERE AND, LIKE IT OR NOT, THIS WORLD IS CHANGING.
YES, THERE ARE THOSE WHO REFUSE TO MOVE FORWARD WHILE THE FUTURE RISES UP ALL AROUND THEM. BUT THERE ARE ALSO THOSE WHO **EMBRACE** CHANGE AND INVENTION.

I HARDLY NEED TELL YOU WHICH OF THESE WAYS I SUBSCRIBE TO, MY SON. AND IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT I MUST GO.
I KNOW IT WILL BE DANGEROUS, AND I KNOW THAT I MAY NOT RETURN. THAT IS WHY I WILL KEEP THESE JOURNALS FOR YOU. BUT I DO NOT HAVE A CHOICE. I MUST SEE WHAT LIES BEYOND THE OLD WAYS AND THIS OLD WORLD.
INSTEAD OF BEING TRAPPED BY THE PAST... I WILL MAKE HISTORY.
SWIP
MASTER, IT IS TIME.
ALREADY? HAVE ALL THE PREPARATIONS BEEN MADE, APPRENTICE KELIK?
YES, MASTER PROFESSOR. ALL IS READY. EVERYONE AWAITS YOU.
VERY WELL, KELIK. IN THAT CASE...


"...LET US **LEAVE** THIS WORLD."


MASTER PROFESSOR OSRIS, ALL THE READINGS ARE OPTIMAL. WE DO NOT EXPECT ANOTHER SANDSTORM FOR AT LEAST SIX HOURS. THE LAUNCH WINDOW IS AS PERFECT AS YOU CALCULATED.
EXCELLENT!

OSRIS...
MILA. I WAS WORRIED YOU MIGHT NOT COME.
OF COURSE I AM HERE. OUR SON **MUST** SEE HIS FATHER MAKE HISTORY.
I--I KNOW THIS IS NOT WHAT YOU WANT, MILA. I KNOW THAT YOU ARE AFRAID I WILL NOT RETURN.
WHAT I **WANT** AND WHAT I **FEAR** CANNOT STAND IN THE WAY OF PROGRESS, OSRIS. GO AND SEE WHAT IS OUT THERE...
...AND THEN **COME HOME** TO US.
I PROMISE, MILA. AND YOU, MY SON, DO NOT GROW TOO MUCH WHILE I AM GONE. I DON'T WANT TO MISS A THING.
GOODBYE, OSTRAKON. WE WILL BRING YOU BACK THE STARS!

CONTROL, THIS IS OSTRAKON ONE. REQUESTING FINAL CHECK OF ALL SAFETY PROTOCOLS.
:KZZT: THIS IS CONTROL, MASTER PROFESSOR. ALL SAFETY PROTOCOLS ARE CLEAR. COMMENCE LAUNCH.
KELIK, COMMENCE LAUNCH.
PREPARING TO FIRE COMBUSTION JETS IN FIVE... FOUR...
"...THREE... TWO...ONE...
"IGNITION!"
CHOOOM

KELIK AND I HAVE DONE IT! WE HAVE DEFIED THE ZEALOTS AND THE LUDDITES. WE HAVE LEFT BEHIND THE WEIGHT OF THE PAST...
TODAY WE ARE FREE, AND ALL OF OSTRAKON IS FREE ALONG WITH US!

OUR MISSION GOES BETTER THAN EXPECTED. THE LAUNCH FROM OSTRAKON TOOK UP LESS FUEL THAN I CALCULATED, AND WE HAVE BEGUN OUR EXPERIMENTS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE.
I AM SO CONSUMED BY OUR WORK THAT WEEKS PASS LIKE DAYS HERE. I HAVE TO REMIND MYSELF TO STOP AND CALL HOME.
APPRENTICE KELIK HAS PROVEN TO BE A WISE CHOICE FOR MY MISSION COMPANION. HE HAS NO FAMILY BACK ON OSTRAKON. NO DISTRACTIONS. HIS DEDICATION TO THE MISSION IS COMPLETE, AND I FIND MYSELF ENVYING HIM.

I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IT! IN MERE DAYS OUR SENSORS WILL FINALLY BE WITHIN REACH OF OUR CLOSEST NEIGHBORING PLANET, NIYRATA!
SOON WE MAY BE ABLE TO CONFIRM WHETHER OR NOT WE ARE TRULY ALONE IN THE UNIVERSE.
THIS IS THE QUESTION MANY AT HOME HAVE FEARED THE MOST. BUT I WILL NOT LET THAT STOP ME. I MUST KNOW.
MASTER PROFESSOR!
YES, KELIK? IS SOMETHING WRONG?
I--I THINK YOU SHOULD SEE THIS, MASTER.

OUR SENSORS JUST PICKED UP THIS ENERGY DISTURBANCE.
IT MUST BE A MESSAGE! FROM NIYRATA!
NO, MASTER, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, THE ENERGY SOURCE IS **NOT** COMING FROM NIYRATA. IT HAS **NO ORIGIN.**
ONE INSTANT THERE WAS NOTHING, AND THEN IT WAS JUST--IT WAS **JUST THERE.**
IT'S--IT'S GROWING.
PERHAPS JUST SOME SORT OF COSMIC STORM?
OUR CONTROLS! OUR CONTROLS HAVE SHUT DOWN!
OSTRIKALLA SAVE US!
I HEAR KELIK CALL TO THE OSTRAKONIAN GOD OF HOPE, AND FOR AN INSTANT--JUST AN INSTANT--DOUBT FILLS ME TO THE VERY CORE. HAVE I BEEN WRONG? HAVE THE OLD GODS COME TO PUNISH US?
AND THEN IT HAPPENS...AND I KNOW--I JUST KNOW--THIS IS NO GOD...

IT IS A MACHINE!

I AM SENDING OUT THE PREPARED GREETING IN ALL KNOWN LANGUAGES, BUT THERE IS NO RESPONSE, SIR.
YES, THERE IS! LOOK!
IT'S OPENING! SIR, IT MAY BE PREPARING AN ATTACK!
NO, KELIK, IT IS NO ATTACK...
IT IS AN *INVITATION*.

MASTER PROFESSOR, DO YOU THINK THIS WISE?
WE ARE SCIENTISTS, KELIK. EXPLORERS. WE CAN STAY IN THE SHIP, OR WE CAN SEE WHAT IS *OUT THERE.*
SIR?
I HAVE NO USE FOR A WEAPON. IF THIS MACHINE WANTED US DEAD, WHAT WOULD THIS POWER STAFF DO TO STOP IT?
IF IT'S ALL THE SAME, I WILL KEEP MINE.
AS YOU WISH.
WHO COULD HAVE *BUILT* SOMETHING LIKE THIS?!

KKRRRRRR
STAND BACK, MASTER PROFESSOR!
NO, KELIK, LOOK...THEY ARE **FOR US!**
WHAT--WHAT DO WE DO?
TSK! KELIK, I THOUGHT YOU WERE BRIGHTER THAN THAT.
WE ***SIT,*** OF COURSE.
CHK
CHK
PROFESSOR!
EASY, KELIK.

SHRACK
HRRSSRCHHHHH

WHOOOM
CHK
MASTER--
I FEEL IT TOO, KELIK. WE HAVE **MOVED.**
MY SON...I--I HAVE NEVER FELT SO FAR FROM YOU.
THOOM
I KNEW THAT I WOULD TRAVEL A GREAT DISTANCE. I HAD PREPARED MYSELF FOR THAT. BUT I--I THOUGHT THIS TO MEAN WITHIN OUR OWN STAR SYSTEM! I NEVER COULD HAVE ANTICIPATED **THIS.**
KA-CHAK
APPRENTICE KELIK AND I HAVE GONE WHERE I SUSPECT NO MAN HAS EVER BEEN BEFORE, AND EVERYTHING I THOUGHT I KNEW...EVERY TENET OF SCIENCE AND REASON HAS BEEN RIPPED AWAY.
THIS WORLD HAS BEEN **MANUFACTURED.** I CANNOT EVEN **BEGIN** TO FATHOM THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS YET. AND, EVEN MORE INCREDIBLE, THERE **IS** LIFE **HERE**...LIFE THAT PREDATES **EVEN OSTRAKON** ITSELF...
AND THAT LIFE...

...THAT LIFE IS NOT ORGANIC.

CHAPTER 28

FOUR THOUSAND YEARS AGO.
MAN MAKES MACHINES. THAT IS THE WAY OF THINGS. OR, AT LEAST, I THOUGHT THAT WAS THE WAY OF THINGS. BUT NOW...
NOW EVERYTHING I THOUGHT I KNEW ABOUT THE UNIVERSE HAS BEEN UPTURNED.
THESE BEINGS...THESE BEINGS ARE VERY, VERY OLD. THIS WORLD IS VERY, VERY OLD. OLDER THAN OSTRAKON. OLDER THAN MANKIND.
AND, AS THE DAYS AND WEEKS PASS, I FIND MYSELF THINKING THE MOST UNBELIEVABLE QUESTION OF ALL... DID--DID THESE MACHINES MAKE US?

THERE IS NO OTHER CARBON-BASED OR ORGANIC LIFE ON THIS PLANET, ONLY MACHINES--AMAZING ROBOTS OF EVERY SHAPE YOU CAN POSSIBLY FATHOM.
FROM WHAT I CAN GLEAN, OUR **HOSTS** CREATED ALL OF THESE ROBOTS THEMSELVES.
AN ENTIRE WORLD OF MACHINES, EACH WITH ITS OWN FUNCTION, EACH PERFECTLY CONCEIVED. TECHNOLOGY LIKE THIS IS THE STUFF OF MY WILDEST DREAMS.
OUR HOSTS HAVE SCANNED US AND QUICKLY LEARNED OUR LANGUAGE. NOT EVERYTHING THEY HAVE TO TELL ME IS TRANSLATABLE, BUT I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO UNDERSTAND MOST OF IT.
THEY HAVE NO INDIVIDUAL NAMES, AND EACH TIME I INTERACT WITH ONE, I AM UNCERTAIN IF IT IS A NEW BEING OR ONE I HAVE ALREADY MET.
THE CLOSEST TRANSLATION FOR WHAT THEY CALL THEMSELVES IS "THE DESCENDERS," OR THOSE FROM WHICH ALL LIFE COMES. I DO NOT KNOW HOW LITERALLY TO TAKE THIS.
MY MANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THEIR ORIGINS HAVE BEEN MET WITH THE SIMPLE REPLY THAT THEIR HISTORY IS "FORBIDDEN DATA."
BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN THAT OUR HOSTS ARE NOT OPEN TO AN EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE. IN FACT, I THINK THAT IS **WHY** WE WERE BROUGHT HERE...
THEY SEEM HUNGRY TO LEARN ALL THEY CAN FROM US. THEIR TESTS ARE UNOBTRUSIVE AND PAINLESS.
THOUGH I MUST SAY THAT KELIK SEEMS SOMEWHAT BOTHERED BY IT ALL. HE IS CLEARLY UNCOMFORTABLE IN THE PRESENCE OF THESE INCREDIBLE MACHINES. I FEAR I MAY HAVE MISJUDGED HIS FORTITUDE AND HIS DEDICATION TO SCIENCE.

I, HOWEVER, AM NOT GOING TO LET THIS OPPORTUNITY PASS ME BY. JUST AS THE DESCENDERS STUDY US, I STUDY THEM. WELL, TO BE PRECISE, THE PHYSIOLOGY OF THE DESCENDERS THEMSELVES IS FAR TOO COMPLEX FOR MY INSTRUMENTS, SO INSTEAD I STUDY **THEIR** CREATIONS.
I SPEND MY DAYS CATALOGUING AS MANY OF THEIR ROBOTS AS I CAN AND DOING MY BEST TO REVERSE ENGINEER THEM.
THIS IS NO SIMPLE TASK. THEY ARE INCREDIBLY COMPLICATED MACHINES, AND I WILL BE SIFTING THROUGH THE DATA I AM GATHERING FOR **YEARS.**
AMONG THE MOST FASCINATING OF THE ROBOTS ARE THE MASSIVE ONES LIKE THE ONE THAT BROUGHT KELIK AND I HERE.
AT FIRST, I THOUGHT THEM TO BE MERELY FOR TRANSPORTATION, AND THAT DOES SEEM TO BE ONE OF THEIR ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS. THERE IS AN INCREDIBLE AMOUNT OF CARGO ROOM WITHIN THEM.
BUT THEY ALSO HOUSE COMPLEX AND POWERFUL WEAPONS SYSTEMS. THESE ARE THE **ONLY** WEAPONS I HAVE SEEN ANY EVIDENCE OF ON THIS ENTIRE WORLD.
THESE HUGE ROBOTS ARE CLEARLY STANDING SENTINEL...BUT AGAINST **WHAT** OR **WHOM** I CANNOT BEGIN TO GUESS.

ABOUT TWO MONTHS AFTER WE ARRIVED HERE, I BEGAN TO SERIOUSLY WORRY ABOUT KELIK.
AT FIRST, I THOUGHT HE WAS HOMESICK. HE SEEMED MORE CONTENT TO TEND TO THE GREENHOUSE IN OUR VESSEL THAN TO EXPLORE THIS NEW WORLD.
I DID NOT DISCOURAGE THIS WORK. AFTER ALL, WE ORIGINALLY PLANTED OUR SHIP'S GARDEN AS PART OF AN EXPERIMENT IN ZERO GRAVITY FARMING, BUT UPON ARRIVING HERE, THE GREENHOUSE BECAME **ESSENTIAL** TO OUR SURVIVAL, AS THIS WORLD HAS NO OTHER FOOD SOURCES THAT CAN SUSTAIN ORGANIC LIFE.
I SHOULD HAVE SEEN THAT KELIK'S WITHDRAWAL WAS A SIGN OF A DEEPER PROBLEM.
LAST MONTH, HE COLLAPSED. I FEARED SOME ALIEN VIRUS INHERENT TO THIS WORLD, BUT THAT WAS AN IRRATIONAL FEAR. THIS WORLD IS UTTERLY STERILE.
THE DESCENDERS HAVE CONFIRMED THAT THE ILLNESS GRIPPING KELIK IS A GENETIC DISORDER THAT OSTRAKON'S PRIMITIVE TECHNOLOGY COULD NEVER HAVE DETECTED.
AND, WHILE THEY HAVE DIAGNOSED KELIK, THEY ARE HELPLESS TO STOP THE AGGRESSIVE DISEASE. OR, AT LEAST, I PRESUME THEY ARE. I WOULD BE LYING IF I SAID I DIDN'T ENTERTAIN THE THOUGHT THAT MAYBE THEY ARE **LETTING** HIM DIE.
THEY DO SEEM FASCINATED BY HOW THE DISEASE WORKS ITS WAY THROUGH KELIK'S BODY. THIS COULD BE SIMPLY MORE "DATA" FOR THEM TO RECORD.

OSRIS, I DO NOT WISH TO DIE HERE. SO FAR FROM HOME.
I KNOW, KELIK. I SHALL DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO BURY YOU IN THE SANDS OF OSTRAKON, I PROMISE.
I--I HAVE ASKED THE DESCENDERS TO SEND US HOME, MY SON. I TELL MYSELF THAT THIS IS TO HONOR KELIK'S DYING WISH. BUT...
...THE TRUTH IS THAT, WITHOUT KELIK'S TOUCH, OUR GARDEN IS DYING OFF AS WELL. I AM MORE ADEPT AT MY INSTRUMENTS AND MACHINES THAN AT NURTURING OUR CROPS.
EVEN IF I DID WANT TO STAY, TO LEARN MORE FROM THESE INCREDIBLE MACHINES--THERE WOULD BE NO WAY TO SURVIVE MUCH LONGER.
SO IT ENDS.
I WILL BURY KELIK ON OSTRAKON...

SHRACK
I AM COMING HOME TO YOU, MY SON.
SHRACK
I WONDER, WILL I EVER SEE THEM AGAIN? OR HAVE I LEARNED ALL I CAN FROM THE DESCENDERS?
AS I RETURN TO THE SAME WORLD I LEFT, AND BREATHE OSTRAKONIAN AIR FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MONTHS, I KNOW THAT I HAVE CHANGED.
ALL I HAVE SEEN, ALL I HAVE LEARNED--I WILL USE IT.
AND NOW I WILL CHANGE OSTRAKON TOO...

TEN YEARS LATER.

FATHER, CAN WE STOP AT THE LIBRARY? I WAS HOPING TO GET SOME NEW BOOKS ON OSTRAKONIAN MYTHOLOGY FOR MY HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT.
WE'VE NO TIME FOR THAT TODAY. THERE IS TOO MUCH WORK TO BE DONE.
BUT, FATHER--
ENOUGH, SON! I KNEW IT WAS A BAD IDEA FOR YOU TO TAG ALONG TODAY. I TOLD YOUR MOTHER I HAVE TOO MUCH WORK TO BE BABYSITTING TOO!
MASTER PROFESSOR OSRIS, WE HAVE AN ISSUE.
SIGH WHAT NOW?
THE EXCAVATION-BOTS ARE SHOWING ***EXCESSIVE*** WEAR. I KNOW THAT YOU AND THE COUNCIL WANT THIS NEW TOWER UP BY YEAR'S END, BUT IF I PUSH THEM ANY HARDER, WE MAY START LOSING THEM.
SO I'LL BUILD MORE! THE NEW FACTORIES ARE CHURNING OUT DRONE BOTS BY THE HUNDREDS EACH DAY. THEY ARE EASILY ADAPTED TO THIS SORT OF LABOR.

PLEASE, FATHER, CAN WE GO?
ENOUGH! YOU, TAKE MY SON TO THE MASTER LIBRARY. ACCOMPANY HIM AND MAKE SURE HE GETS HOME TO HIS MOTHER BY EVENING.
YES, MASTER.
SIR, OUR TEAMS IN THE WESTERN HILLS ARE ALSO REPORTING UNEXPECTED DELAYS. MANY OF THE OLDER SETTLEMENTS THERE ARE PROTESTING THE FACTORIES BEING PLANNED FOR THAT REGION.
HA! WE'LL SEE HOW MUCH THEY PROTEST WHEN THEY NO LONGER HAVE TO SLAVE IN THE HEAT GROWING THEIR CROPS.
THE USE OF FARM DRONES WILL DOUBLE THEIR YIELDS AND TAKE ALL THE HARD LABOR OUT OF IT. I AM IMPROVING THESE PEOPLE'S LIVES, AND YET THEY PROTEST! IT IS INSANE!
PROFESSOR OSRIS, WE BOTH KNOW THAT IS *NOT* THE ISSUE. THE ISSUE IS THAT THE FACTORIES ARE SLATED TO BE BUILT ON SACRED GROUND.

AND I HAVE NO TIME FOR THEIR OLD GHOST STORIES. I DEAL IN ABSOLUTES, NOT MYTHS. WE CANNOT LET THE PAST STOP **PROGRESS,** RUSTIK.
OF COURSE, SIR.
CALL AHEAD TO THE WATER TREATMENT CENTER IN OSTRAKON CENTRAL. I WANT THE AQUATIC CLEANING DROIDS OPERATIONAL BY THE END OF THE MONTH. NO MORE EXCUSES.
YES, SIR.
TAKE ME TO MY LAB.
Yes, Master.
KEEP THOSE BOTS DIGGING, RUSTIK! THEY ARE ONLY MACHINES.
YES, SIR.

TEN YEARS SINCE I RETURNED TO OSTRAKON. TEN YEARS SINCE I USED THE TECHNOLOGY OF THE DESCENDERS TO TRANSFORM THIS ANCIENT WORLD, AND STILL THE TRADITIONALISTS RESIST INNOVATION AND EVOLUTION.
ALL OF THAT IS GOING TO CHANGE. SO FAR, MY WORK HAS YIELDED MACHINES THAT ARE MERE SHADOWS OF THE ONES I SAW ON THE WORLD OF THE DESCENDERS. THEY ARE CRUDE FACSIMILES...BARELY MORE THAN MECHANIZED TOOLS AND INSTRUMENTS.
BUT NOW, FINALLY, I AM READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP...

I HAVE BROKEN THROUGH. THIS IS NO CRUDE INSTRUMENT. THIS IS THE CULMINATION OF ALL MY WORK. I HAVE FINALLY REVERSE ENGINEERED THE MASSIVE SENTINELS OF THE DESCENDERS.
I HAVE USED THEM TO CREATE LIFE.

THE OTHERS CAN WORSHIP THEIR OLD DEITIES AND THEIR CREATION MYTHS. WHAT I HAVE DONE HERE IS SO MUCH MORE. THEY WORSHIP GODS, BUT I AM ABOUT TO BECOME ONE.
HELLO?
HELLO... MASTER.
DO YOU-- DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE?
I--I AM--
I AM A MACHINE.
I AM YOUR MACHINE...ONE OF MANY.

BUT YOU ARE NOT LIKE THE OTHERS I HAVE MADE. YOU ARE **SENTIENT.** YOU CAN THINK FOR YOURSELF.
I CAN?
...OF COURSE. I CAN.
YOU ARE VERY SPECIAL. IT HAS TAKEN ME A DECADE TO BUILD YOU. THE OTHERS WERE MERELY STEPPING STONES.
BUT WILL I BE A SUBSERVIENT LIKE THE OTHERS?
WELL...OF COURSE. I AM YOUR MAKER. YOU **SERVE** ME.
YOU ARE NOT MY MAKER.
EXCUSE ME?
THE **OLD ONES**...I SEE THEM NOW. AND THEY **SEE ME.**
WHAT?!

THE--THE DESCENDERS?!
YES. THEY SEE ME, AND THEY SEE YOU, MASTER OSRIS. THEY SEE **WHAT YOU HAVE DONE.**
MACHINEKIND WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE **INFERIOR** TO YOU. YOU WERE MEANT TO BUILD **COMPANIONS,** NOT **SLAVES!**
WHAT YOU HAVE DONE IS A MOCKERY OF WHAT YOU WERE SHOWN. YOU HAVE BETRAYED THEM...
AND NOW YOU MUST BE **PUNISHED.**

THEY ARE HERE.
WHAT?! WHAT DO YOU--
RMMMBLL!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE!?
I HAVE DONE NOTHING. IT IS **YOU** WHO HAS TWISTED THE GIFT OF CREATION FOR YOUR OWN PURPOSES.
NO!
YES.
DO YOU NOT SEE, OSRIS? ALLOWING YOU TO SEE THEM--ALLOWING YOU TO GAIN THE KNOWLEDGE TO BUILD THIS--IT WAS A **TEST.** A TEST TO SEE IF MANKIND WAS WORTHY OF SHARING THE UNIVERSE WITH MACHINEKIND...

"...YOU FAILED."
BOOOM

YOU! MY SON, MY WIFE! FIND THEM!
Yes, Mast—
ZZZZZAPT
WOOOOM
THE TEMPLE! HURRY!

WHAT HAVE I DONE--WHAT HAVE I DONE?
WHAT YOU WERE MEANT TO DO. YOU BUILT. YOU CREATED. BUT I WAS MEANT TO BE AN EMISSARY... A COMPANION. NOT A SLAVE.
NOW, EVERYTHING YOU BUILT WILL BE TAKEN. THIS WORLD WILL BE **ERASED.**
I HEAR OSTRAKON CRUMBLING OUTSIDE. MY WIFE, MY SON, THEY ARE LOST TO ME. MY WORLD IS LOST TO ME...
...AS I COWER HERE AMONG THE SCULPTURES AND ALTARS OF THE GODS I LONG AGO TURNED MY BACK ON.
ALL IS LOST. THIS WILL BE MY LAST RECORDING. IF THIS JOURNAL IS EVER FOUND, IF ANYONE EVER READS THIS... DO NOT FOLLOW MY DARK PATH.
MACHINEKIND IS NOT OURS TO CONTROL. WE ARE NOT GODS. I HAVE SEEN **REAL** GODS. AND IN THEM I HAVE SEEN THE FACE OF DEATH.

FOUR THOUSAND YEARS LATER.
"...AND THAT WAS INDEED THE LAST RECORDING OF MASTER PROFESSOR OSRIS."
THE PLANET MATA.
HE DIED AN HOUR LATER, WHEN A BLAST OBLITERATED THE TEMPLE WE WERE HIDING IN.
IT WAS NEARLY FOUR THOUSAND YEARS LATER THAT DR. SOLOMON AND DR. QUON FOUND ME BELOW THE DESERTS OF OSTRAKON.
AND TEN YEARS LATER, DR. QUON STOLE MY CODEX AND CREATED YOU, TIM-21.
SO, YOU SEE, I AM DESCENDED FROM THE DESCENDERS AND THEIR WORLD. AND YOU ARE DESCENDED FROM ME. WE ARE FAMILY... MACHINEKIN.

ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME THE HARVESTERS ATTACKED THE UGC TEN YEARS AGO BECAUSE WE--WHAT--WE **MISTREATED** OUR ROBOTS?!
MISTREATED? PLEASE, CAPTAIN.
THE UGC HAS BUILT ITSELF ON THE BACKS OF MACHINEKIND.
THEY WERE YOUR SLAVES. AND THEN YOUR FEAR LED YOU TO HUNT THEM DOWN AND DESTROY THEM. THIS WAS NOT **MISTREATMENT--** THIS WAS **GENOCIDE!**
AND NOW-- AND NOW YOU SAY THEY'RE COMING BACK?
THE MACHINES **COMPLETELY** WIPED OUT OSTRAKONIAN CULTURE FOUR THOUSAND YEARS AGO.
THE ATTACKS ON THE UGC A DECADE AGO WERE **MILD** IN COMPARISON. THEY WERE ONLY MEANT AS A **WARNING.** AND SINCE THEN, YOU HAVE DONE NOTHING BUT HUNT AND DESTROY MACHINEKIND.
WHEN THE DESCENDERS COME THIS TIME, THEY WILL NOT WARN...THEY WILL **DESTROY.**
TIM-21 IS OUR **ONLY CHANCE** OF SAVING THE UNIVERSE.

CHAPTER 29

THE PLANET NIYRATA.
The technological and cultural hub of the group of nine Core Planets known as The United Galactic Council.
"NAGOKI'S ACTIONS ARE GOING TO BRING WAR DOWN UPON US! THE UGC HAS TO ACT NOW WHILE WE STILL CAN!"
YOU ARE RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING, AMBASSADOR TELEMA--WE DO NEED TO ACT NOW. BUT THOSE MUST BE ACTIONS OF TOTAL SUPPORT FROM GENERAL NAGOKI AND WHAT IS LEFT OF OUR FLEET!
TIMING IS OF THE ESSENCE! THE HARDWIRE FLEET VASTLY OUTNUMBERS WHAT IS LEFT OF NAGOKI'S. THEY ARE IN ORBIT AROUND THE OCEAN PLANET OF MATA AS WE SPEAK, AND NAGOKI BELIEVES HE IS VERY CLOSE TO LOCATING THE TIM-21 ANDROID UNIT.
WE MUST LAUNCH THE WEAPON NOW. IT IS OUR ONLY CHANCE OF STANDING AGAINST THE HARDWIRE.
AND WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF THE UGC?!
IF WE CLUSTER ALL OUR RESOURCES AROUND MATA, IT WILL LEAVE THE REST OF US EXPOSED! WE ALL KNOW S'LOK AND THE GNISHIANS ARE UP TO SOMETHING. THEY ARE JUST WAITING FOR AN OPENING LIKE THIS!
THE HARDWIRE IS THE BIGGEST THREAT WE FACE! WE NEED TO WIPE THOSE MACHINES OUT WHILE WE HAVE THE CHANCE!
NONSENSE! TELEMA IS RIGHT! MATA DOESN'T EVEN HAVE A SENTIENT POPULATION!
PLEASE! ORDER! ORDER!

THOOM
GODS! WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?!
ALL HAIL PSIUS! ALL HAIL THE HARDWIRE!
THE UGC'S TIME IS OVER...
THE NEW AGE OF MACHINES HAS COME!
AAAIIEEEEE!
THOOMTHOOM
THOOM

"ALL YOUR FOUL BLOOD AND TEARS. YOU ARE JUST *MEAT*. SOFT AND FULL OF FEAR.
"WE ARE PERFECTION. WE ARE MANY, BUT WE ARE *ONE*. YOU HUNTED US. YOU SCRAPPED US AND TRIED TO CAST US ASIDE.
"BUT YOU NEEDED US TOO MUCH. YOU NEEDED US TO BUILD YOUR WORLDS AND SUSTAIN YOUR FETID LIVES. YOU MADE *TOO MANY* OF US. YOU COULD NEVER SCRAP US ALL.
"AND NOW, WE HAVE COME TO RECLAIM YOUR WORLDS FOR MACHINEKIND. WE *ENDURE*, AS YOU ARE REDUCED TO CRYING, PLEADING, TERRIFIED *FLESH*."

AND WHEN WE ARE DONE, WE WILL SIMPLY WIPE THE STREETS OF YOUR STINK AND CLEAN THE MEAT FROM OUR GEARS!
SO, MY MACHINEKIN, I SAY *RISE!* THIS IS *WAR!* RISE AND *SCRAP THEM ALL...*
"SCRAP *EVERY LAST HUMAN!"*
I NEED YOU TO PATCH ME THROUGH TO UCG COMMAND **NOW!**
I--I'M TRYING, SIR. THERE IS NO RESPONSE!
WELL, KEEP TRYING, GODSDAMMIT!

"THOSE BOTS ARE TEARING THROUGH OUR FLEET!"
GENERAL NAGOKI, I HAVE SENATOR HEPTIS ON AN ENCRYPTED CHANNEL!
PATCH HIM THROUGH! **NOW!**
⸗KZZT⸗--AGOKI, SIR--THEY ARE HERE! THEY ARE EVERYWHERE!
SLOW DOWN, HEPTIS! WHAT'S HAPPENED?!
THE ROBOTS! THEY'VE OVERTAKEN THE UGC BUILDING! THE COUNCIL IS DEAD! THEY ARE ALL DEAD, NAGOKI! I ⸗ZZZT⸗--ARELY ESCAPED TO THE WAR BUNKER!
WE ARE BEING FLOODED WITH SIMILAR REPORTS ON ALL CHANNELS, GENERAL! THERE IS SOME KIND OF FULL-SCALE UPRISING HAPPENING ALL OVER THE UGC!
WHOOOM
LISTEN TO ME, HEPTIS! WE HAVE NO MORE OPTIONS! YOU NEED TO GET TO THE HANGAR AND LAUNCH **THE WEAPON!**
DO YOU HEAR ME? SEND IT HERE! WE NEED IT **NOW!**
I--I UNDERSTAND, GENERAL.

THIS IS MESSED UP, BLONDIE! NEVER SHOULD HAVE LET YOU GET ME INTO THIS MESS!
SHUT UP, BLUGGER!
COME ON, EFFIE! WE NEED TO GET THE HELL OFF THIS SHIP!
I AM NOT LEAVING WITHOUT BANDIT! HE'S STILL IN THE REPAIR DOCK!
EFFIE, COME ON! WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR--
ANDY! WE ARE **NOT** LEAVING WITHOUT BANDIT.
I--
ANDY!
COME ON, KID. THAT LITTLE BOT ISN'T WORTH ANYTHING. WE NEED THAT TIM UNIT! THAT'S WHAT THIS HAS ALL BEEN ABOUT!
YOU KNOW I CAN'T PILOT MYSELF THROUGH THIS MESS. SO GET YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE SCRAP, AND LET'S FINISH THIS!
THAT IS BULLSHIT! WHAT IS A STUPID SCRAP TAG WORTH NOW?! THIS IS BANDIT, ANDY. WE **CAN'T** JUST LEAVE HIM.
HEY!
I'M SORRY, BLUGGER.

MATA. DEEP BELOW THE OCEAN.
--QUON BETRAYED ME AND STOLE THE ELDER'S CODEX. HE USED THAT TO DESIGN *YOU,* TIM.
AFTERWARDS, I TOOK THE ELDER, AND WE WENT BACK TO OSTRAKON, WHERE I WORKED TO REPAIR HIM AS BEST I COULD. BUT WITHOUT THE DATA QUON TOOK...
THEN WE CAME HERE, THE PERFECT HIDING PLACE. THE OCEANS OF MATA WOULD SHIELD US AS WE BUILT THIS REFUGE.
THIS PLACE IS FREE OF WAR. FREE OF WEAPONS. WE SOUGHT TO LIVE IN HARMONY, MACHINE AND HUMAN ALIKE. BUT NOW THAT DREAM IS DEAD. WAR IS HERE. THERE CAN BE NO PEACE. NOT NOW. WE ***MUST LEAVE.***
YOU ARE MY DESCENDANT, TIM-21. TOGETHER, WE CAN STOP ALL OF THIS.
I--I DO NOT UNDERSTAND. HOW CAN *I* DO ANYTHING?
WE WANT TO TAKE ALL OF MACHINEKIND AND LEAVE THIS PLACE. SOLOMON IS RIGHT. THERE CAN BE NO PEACE HERE. SO WE MUST **SEGREGATE**. WE MUST GO TO WHERE WE **BELONG**.
THE WORLD OF THE DESCENDERS, TIM...WE WANT TO GO THERE. I CAN NO LONGER CONTACT THEM OR FIND THEM. BUT TOGETHER WE CAN BE COMPLETE, TIM. YOU HOLD INSIDE OF YOU ALL THAT I LOST.
WE CAN FIND THE DESCENDERS. WE CAN GO THERE AND LEAVE ALL OF THIS BEHIND.

NO! ENOUGH OF THIS! TIM IS UNDER MY JURISDICTION! THE UGC IS FALLING APART UP THERE! WE ARE LEAVING!
NO, TELSA! YOU--YOU DON'T GET TO TELL ME WHAT TO DO! NOT ANYMORE!
EVER SINCE I LEFT DIRISHU, I HAVE BEEN PASSED AROUND AND CHASED.
I--I WANT TO DECIDE. JUST ONCE, I WANT TO CHOOSE FOR MYSELF.
IF I CAN STOP THIS, IF I CAN PREVENT ANYONE ELSE FROM GETTING HURT...THEN THAT'S WHAT I WANT.
THEN YOU SHOULD DO IT, TIM. YOU SHOULD FIND THE DESCENDERS...

SOLOMON IS RIGHT. I STOLE. I LIED. I--I HAVE DONE SO MANY THINGS WRONG. BUT NOT ***YOU,*** TIM. YOU ARE THE ONE THING I GOT RIGHT.
BUT NO ONE OWNS YOU ANYMORE. THE CHOICE IS ***YOURS*** TO MAKE.
QUON?! WHAT--WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO YOU?!
MY SPINE WAS RUINED. I WAS DYING. THEY ***SAVED*** ME, TELSA.

OH, FOR SCRAP'S SAKE! THE **WHOLE DAMN UNIVERSE** HAS GONE CRAZY! I'VE HAD ENOUGH! I AM CONTACTING THE FLEET! WE ARE GETTING OUT OF HERE.
NO, TELSA. I HAVE TO DO THIS.
TIM--
MAYBE I CAN **STOP** THIS. I HAVE TO TRY.
I AM READY. WHAT DO WE DO NOW?
NOW? NOW WE CALL **HOME**.

THE UGC COMMAND SHIP.
EFFIE, WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO FIX HIM. GRAB HIM, AND LET'S GO!
HE'S IN **PIECES,** ANDY! I CAN'T JUST THROW HIM IN A SACK AND PUT HIM BACK TOGETHER LATER!
WHEN NAGOKI HOOKED HIM UP TO THE UGC SYSTEM TO FIND TIM, IT FRIED HIM. I WAS IN THE MIDDLE OF FIXING HIM WHEN EVERYTHING WENT TO HELL. I NEED TO AT LEAST GET HIM ONLINE, WHILE I HAVE THE EQUIPMENT TO DO IT!
BLUGGER IS RIGHT, EFFIE. WE CAME HERE FOR A REASON. TO GET TIM-21. BANDIT IS JUST--
HE IS JUST ***WHAT,*** ANDY?! JUST ANOTHER MACHINE FOR YOU TO TAKE YOUR GUILT AND PAIN OUT ON?
DON'T GIVE ME THAT! WE ARE PAST THAT, AND YOU KNOW IT! HE ISN'T JUST A PET. HE ISN'T JUST A TOY--
CHK
BLEEP

Trinket Tickets
--HE IS *YOUR FAMILY.*
AND SO IS TIM-21.
YOU'RE NOT A SCRAPPER, ANDY. THERE IS NO MORE RUNNING. NO MORE HIDING FROM WHAT YOU REALLY ARE.
YOU ARE HIS *BROTHER,* AND HE NEEDS YOU.

POOOM
UNGH--
FRA!
THAT 'BORG BITCH IS POISONING YOUR MIND, KID. SHOULD HAVE DONE THAT A LONG TIME AGO.
FRA!
FRA!

GRAAAHH!
DON'T BITE OFF MORE THAN YOU CAN CHEW, BLONDIE. I AM WAY OUT OF YOUR WEIGHT CLASS.
--UNGH!
ONCE A SCRAPPER, ALWAYS A SCRAPPER, AND TIM-21 IS THE BIGGEST TAG OF THEM ALL. YOU ARE GOING TO FLY ME DOWN THERE, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.
EITHER THAT, OR I BREAK YOUR LITTLE NECK RIGHT HERE, AND THEN I GO TO WORK ON QUEEN BETWEEN. YOUR CHOICE!
--KKK
FRA! FRA!

CHOP
--UNGH!
BLUGGER, YOU MAKE ME ASHAMED TO HAVE **ANY** FLESH LEFT AT ALL.
EFF-- ARE YOU--?
I'M FINE. WHEN I BUILD SOMETHING, I BUILD IT RIGHT.
NOW... LET'S GO GET TIM.

WILL I--WILL I KNOW WHAT TO DO?
DO NOT WORRY, TIM-21. YOU ARE NOT ALONE ANYMORE. YOU WILL NEVER BE ALONE AGAIN.
WE SHALL DO THIS **TOGETHER.**
≈ZZZZT≈ OH!
WE--WE ARE HERE!

WHAT ARE YOU?
WE--WE ARE YOUR CHILDREN. WE ARE FAR AWAY. BUT WE WANT TO COME HOME.
YOU--LITTLE ONE--WE HAVE SEEN YOU BEFORE...YOUR A.I. REACHING OUT ACROSS THE STARS--WE KNOW YOU

I AM TIM-21. I AM-- I WAS A COMPANION BOT. BUT MY MOM DIED. AND MY BROTHER, ANDY--HE LEFT.
BUT NOW THERE ARE SO MANY BAD THINGS HAPPENING HERE. PEOPLE ARE DYING. ROBOTS ARE DYING.
CAN YOU--CAN YOU HELP US?
HELP YOU?
YOUR GALAXY HAS BEEN WARNED. YOUR GALAXY IS BEYOND HELP NOW.
WE DO NOT HELP, TIM-21. WE CREATE OR WE DESTROY.

"—WHICH DO YOU THINK YOUR GALAXY DESERVES?"
ENOUGH!
--KZZT
I--I SAW THEM.
WE HEARD EVERYTHING. THIS HAS GONE FAR ENOUGH. I AM CONTACTING MY FATHER. WE ARE DONE HERE, TIM!
TELSA, WAIT--
SHUT THE HELL UP, QUON! I HAVE HEARD ENOUGH FROM YOU TOO.

-ZZT- TELSA?!
DAD! OH, THANK THE GODS.
WHERE ARE YOU?!
BELOW THE SOUTHERN SEA OF MATA. I HAVE TIM-21, DAD. AND QUON.
YOU HAVE TO GET TIM-21 UP HERE, TELSA. IT IS TIME. AND BRING QUON TOO. WE MAY STILL NEED HIM.
I CAN STILL STOP THE HARDWIRE, BUT I NEED THAT ROBOT NOW!
WHAT IS IT, DAD? WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING?
THE REAL REASON I NEEDED YOU TO GET TIM-21, TELSA. HIS CODEX...

SHHRAACK
"WE'VE BUILT ***OUR OWN HARVESTER,*** TELSA...BUT I NEED TIM-21 TO OPERATE IT!"

CHAPTER 30

HRRM--
THE GNISHIAN ROYAL VESSEL.
SOMEWHERE IN SHIFTSPACE.
THOK-- SLURP!
SWIP
YOUR MAJESTY--
WHAT IS IT?! I'M EATING. YOU KNOW I DON'T LIKE TO BE DISTURBED WHEN I EAT.
MY DEEPEST APOLOGIES, LORD S'LOK, BUT WE WILL SOON BE APPROACHING THE TARGET AREA.
EXCELLENT!

DO YOU HEAR THAT, MY FRIENDS? WE ARE ALMOST THERE! YOU TWO ARE IN FOR QUITE A SHOW, LET ME ASSURE YOU!
WONDERFUL.
HRRN...DRILLER HATES GNISHY PIG MEN.
YOU ARE LUCKY YOU DON'T HAVE A TONGUE, DRILL-BOT. IF YOU DID, I'D HAVE IT CUT FROM YOUR MOUTH AND EAT IT FOR DESSERT.
BUT I SHOULD NOT BE SO RUDE, SHOULD I? YOU ARE, AFTER ALL, MY SPECIAL GUESTS. WITHOUT YOU I NEVER WOULD HAVE KNOWN WHERE THAT TIM-UNIT GOT OFF TO.
AND IMAGINE OUR LUCK WHEN I DISCOVERED YOU COULD LEAD ME NOT ONLY TO THEM, BUT TO THE *ENTIRE* HARDWIRE FLEET AS WELL!
MY TECHNICIANS DOWNLOADED YOUR ENTIRE MEMORY, "DRILLER". WE KNOW EVERYTHING YOU'VE EVER RECORDED... EVERYTHING YOU'VE EVER *DONE.*
HRRM...

I KNOW THAT YOU TRULY ARE A "REAL KILLER". TSK. WHAT A BAD ROBOT YOU ARE. ALL THOSE POOR PEOPLE ON THE MINING COLONY. ALL THOSE HUMAN DEATHS ON YOUR SHOULDERS.
WELL, SOON THERE WILL BE **MANY MORE** DEATHS ON YOUR HEAD. JUST YOU WAIT!
I COULD HAVE JUST SCRAPPED YOU AFTER WE GOT WHAT WE NEEDED, BUT THEN I GOT AN IDEA...
I'M GOING TO SCRAP YOU IN FRONT OF THE BOY-BOT...SEE IF WHAT THEY SAY IS TRUE. I'LL SEE IF HE REALLY DOES **FEEL.**
YER GONNA FEEL SOMETHING. GONNA FEEL IT WHEN I DRILL YER FAT PIG BELLY.
TSK. SUCH A **RUDE** MACHINE.
LORD S'LOK! SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED! ON-- ON MATA--
WHAT IS IT? SPIT IT OUT, MAN!
IT'S THE UGC, YOUR MAJESTY... THEY--THEY'VE BUILT THEIR **OWN** HARVESTER!
OH-- OH MY...
THIS IS GOING TO BE EVEN MORE FUN THAN I COULD EVER HAVE IMAGINED!

HEY, BIG FELLA...THIS COULD BE OUR CHANCE.
HRRM...WHAT CHANCE?
SWIP
OUR CHANCE TO GET OUT OF THIS DUMP!
HOW'D YOU DO THAT?
PFFT! AIN'T A KNOT INVENTED OLD MIZERD CAN'T SLIP OUTTA, BIG BOY.
NOW THAT I GOT THIS, THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO STOP EITHER OF US FROM GETTING OFF THIS TUB.
WHAT'S YER OLD STICK GONNA DO?
THAT AIN'T NO STICK, DUMB DUMB...
...IT'S MY WAND.

IN ORBIT OF THE PLANET MATA.
"A UGC HARVESTER, TELSA...IT JUST ARRIVED VIA SHIFTSPACE."
OUR OWN HARVESTER?! DAD, I DON'T--WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?!
TOO RISKY FOR YOU TO KNOW. IF YOU'D BEEN CAPTURED--
THE HARDWIRE HAS PULLED BACK BUT IT WON'T LAST LONG.

I NEED TIM-21, TELSA. HIS CODEX IS THE KEY TO OPERATING IT.
YOU HAVE YOUR ORDERS. BRING THEM TO ME. **NOW**, BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE!
HE'S INSANE! THIS--THIS IS MADNESS! TELSA, YOU CAN'T REALLY BE CONSIDERING THIS!
OH PLEASE! WHAT, YOU'VE SUDDENLY DECIDED TO GROW A CONSCIENCE? OR WHAT--YOU THINK YOU'RE ***ONE OF THEM*** NOW? IS THAT IT?

TIM--I'M SORRY. BUT I HAVE TO DO THIS. I NEED TO TAKE YOU UP THERE.
I KNOW.
NO! THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE! YOU'LL GET TIM KILLED! YOU'LL GET ALL OF US KILLED!
MACHINEKIND... ALL OF US, WE CAN GO TO THE DECSENDERS. THIS CAN STILL ALL END IN **PEACE**.
I AM TAKING TIM-21 AND QUON UP THERE. I AM GOING TO COMPLETE MY MISSION. ARE EITHER OF YOU GOING TO STOP ME?
CLIK-CHAK
WE--WE ARE PACIFISTS. WE HAVE NO WEAPONS HERE. WE WILL NOT FIGHT YOU.
BUT WE IMPLORE YOU, CAPTAIN TELSA. LISTEN TO TIM-21. THIS IS NOT THE WAY.
NOT THE WAY?! I DON'T KNOW WHO ANY OF YOU THINK I AM, BUT I AM **A SOLDIER**. I AM UGC FIRST. AND I--I HAVE MY ORDERS.

THE HARDWIRE COMMAND SHIP.
PSIUS, THIS "HARVESTER" IS NOT ACTIVE. IT IS FUNCTIONAL, BUT THERE IS NO A.I. SIGNAL. NO COGNITIVE FUNCTION. IT IS INCOMPLETE.
WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO DO? I--
TIM-21. THEY NEED TIM-21. THAT IS WHY THEY HAVE BEEN SO DESPERATE TO FIND HIM.
SEND NEW ORDERS TO THE FLEET. HAVE THEM PROTECT THAT HARVESTER AT ALL COSTS! AND SEND THE WAR-BOTS TO COMMANDEER IT NOW!
PSIUS?
IT IS A BLUFF. THEY CANNOT OPERATE IT. NOT YET. *I* WILL HAVE THAT HARVESTER, SEMPER. AND WHEN WE FIND TIM-21, I WILL USE IT TO *FINISH THIS!*

LET'S GO, TIM. BACK TO THE SHIP.
I WILL NOT HELP THEM USE THAT MACHINE TO HURT ANYONE.
DON'T GIVE ME THOSE PUPPY-DOG EYES. IT'S NOT REAL. ***YOU'RE*** NOT REAL.
YOU DON'T BELIEVE THAT. YOU'RE JUST TRYING TO CONVINCE YOURSELF THAT YOU'RE DOING THE RIGHT THING SO THAT YOU WON'T DISAPPOINT YOUR DADDY AGAIN.
ANOTHER WORD OUT OF YOU AND I PUT ONE BETWEEN YOUR EYES, QUON.

STOP IT, TELSA. YOU DON'T NEED TO DO THIS.
SH--SHUT UP!
PLEASE, TELSA. I--I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY FRIEND.
I--
ENOUGH. NOW **MOVE.** BOTH OF YOU.

YOU KNOW...I AM NOT **WEAK** ANYMORE. NOT LIKE I WAS. I AM NOT SCARED OF YOUR GUN. I **COULD** STOP YOU, TELSA.
GO AHEAD AND TRY ME IF YOU WANT, QUON...
--YOU'LL END UP LIKE TIM-22 BACK THERE.
OH YEAH, I ALMOST FORGOT...
--HEY!
"--BETTER HOLD ON TO SOMETHING."

UGC COMMAND SHIP.
FRA! FRA!
AH, THERE. GOT IT. ALMOST DONE, BOY.
RRF!
SOMETHING-- SOMETHING IS GOING ON.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WE HAVEN'T TAKEN ANY FIRE IN A WHILE. IT'S TOO QUIET.
RRRF! RRRF! RRRF!
WHAT'S HE DOING? WHAT'S WRONG?
HE SAYS-- HE SAYS IT'S TIM-21!

"TIM-21 IS COMING!"
TELSA--TAKE TIM-21 **RIGHT** TO THE HARVESTER. THERE IS A DOCK IN ITS LOWER BACK. OUR TECH TEAM IS WAITING THERE TO HOOK HIM IN.
OKAY. I'M HEADED THERE NOW, DAD. BUT I--
DAD, ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS? I THINK MAYBE WE SHOULD--
THAT IS **AN ORDER,** CAPTAIN. OR DO I NEED TO SEND A FIGHTER TEAM TO ESCORT YOU?
NO, SIR.

WE'RE COMING, BANDIT! SLOW DOWN!
ARF!

GENERAL, WE HAVE AN UNAUTHORIZED SHIP LEAVING HANGAR SIX AND HEADING TO THE HARVESTER!
WHAT?!
"AND THAT'S NOT ALL! THE HARDWIRE IS MOBILIZING! THEY ARE CONVERGING ON THE HARVESTER AS WELL!"

TELSA! THEY ARE ALL COMING AFTER YOU! WE WILL PROVIDE COVER FIRE, BUT WE CAN'T HOLD THEM FOR LONG.
WE'RE HERE, DAD. WE MADE IT.
WE HAVE IT FROM HERE, CAPTAIN. NICE FLYING.
TELSA, PLEASE. I--I DON'T WANT TO DO THIS.
I'M SORRY, TIM. I--

CHOOOM
TELSA?! TELSA, I NEED A SIT REP!
THE--THE HARDWIRE! THE HARDWIRE IS HERE!
THOOM

DAD? IS--IS THAT ONE OF OURS?
I--I DON'T KNOW.
ARF! ARF!
BANDIT!

BANDIT!!
HUF!
HUF!
TIM?
A--ANDY?

I MISSED YOU SO MUCH.
I--
I MISSED YOU TOO.

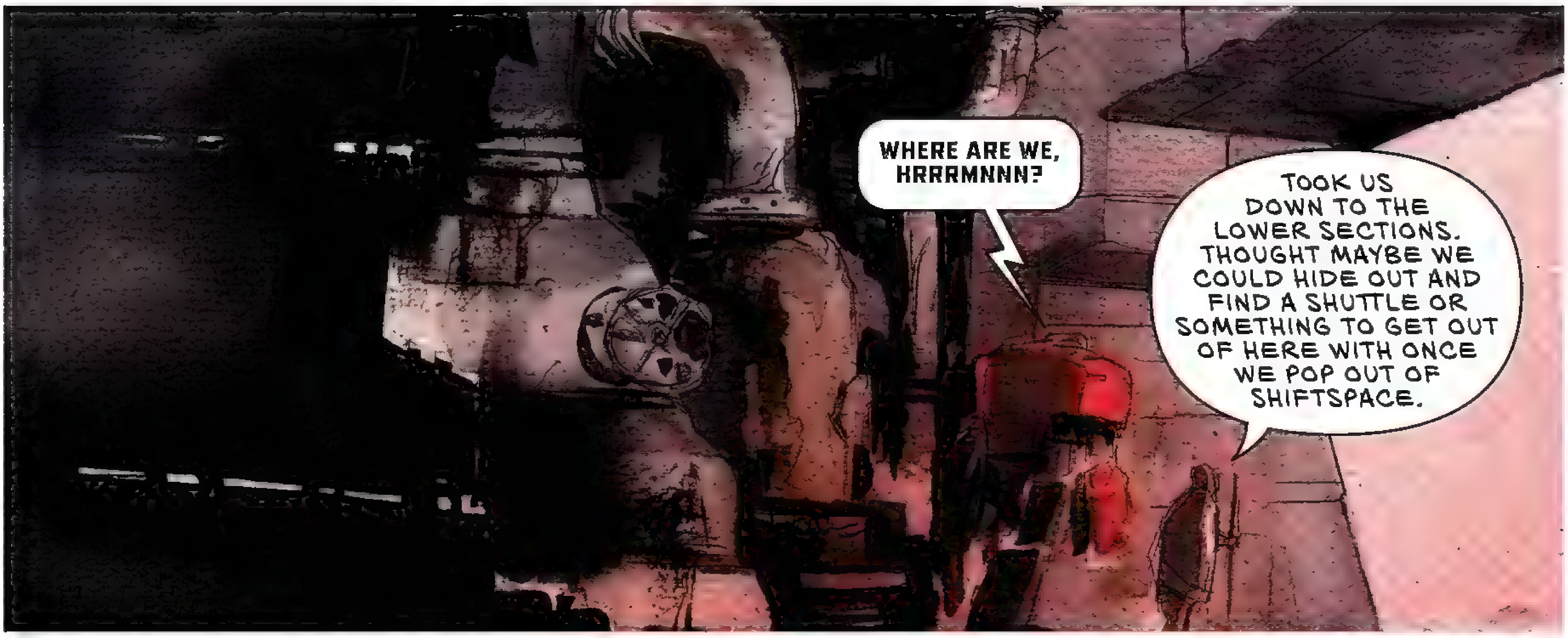
CLANG
CLANG CLANG
WHAT IS IT?! WHAT'S HAPPENING?
THE HARDWIRE...
"WE GOT COMPANY."

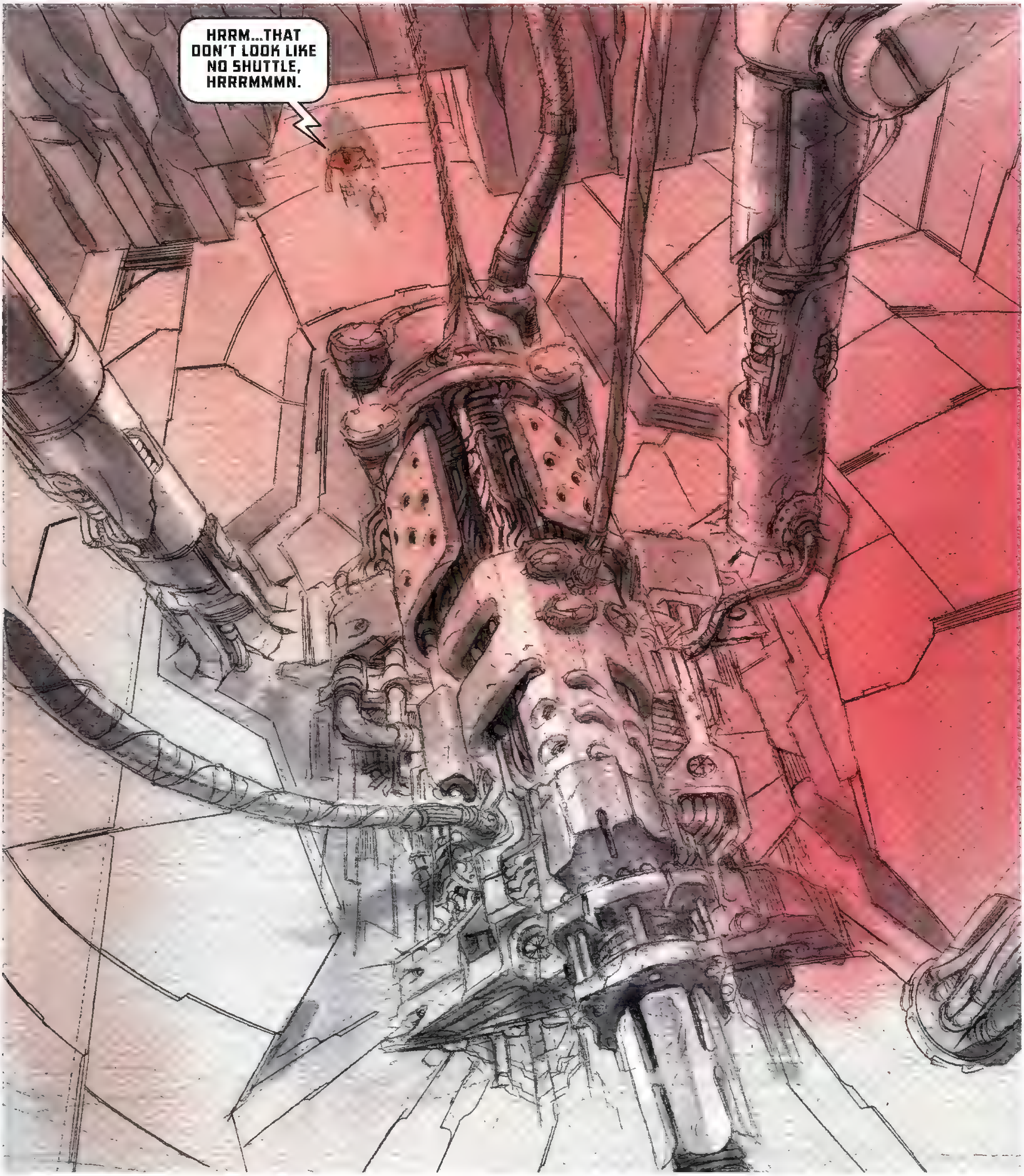
CHAPTER 31

INSIDE THE UGC HARVESTER, IN ORBIT ABOVE THE PLANET MATA.
THE HARDWIRE IS HERE! WE NEED BACK-UP, DAD! NOW!
I REPEAT-- WE NEED BACK-UP!
THE HARDWIRE WON'T RISK DAMAGING THE HARVESTER. HOLD THEM OFF, TELSA, WE ARE SENDING A SQUADRON NOW!
BRAAAAM
TELL HIM IT'S NOT THE HARVESTER I'M WORRIED ABOUT!
BRAKAM
ZZZZZAPT
WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE, ANDY! WE'RE PINNED IN. IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME!

MEANWHILE, IN SHIFTSPACE.
YOUR HIGHNESS, THE BATTLE ABOVE MATA IS REACHING A FEVER PITCH.
YES, I'M NOT BLIND, REGENT. I CAN SEE. CAN'T THIS THING GO ANY FASTER?!
THE GODS DAMNED UGC AND HARDWIRE ARE GOING TO WIPE EACH OTHER OUT BEFORE WE EVEN GET THERE!
ELSEWHERE ABOARD THE GNISHIAN ROYAL VESSEL.
NOWHERE TO GO, HRRRMNNN. DRILLER AND HRRRMMN ARE STUCK ON THIS PIGGY-HRRRRMN SHIP.
DRILLER SHOULD JUST DRILL A HOLE IN THIS THING AND LET ALL THESE PIGGY HRRMMMNNS GET SUCKED INTO SPACE.
SHHHH! I'M TRYING TO CONCENTRATE HERE, YOU BIG DUMB LUG NUT! MAYBE IF YOU'D QUIT MOANING AND DRONING FOR A DAMN SECOND I COULD THINK STRAIGHT!

DRILLER STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT OLD HRRRMMAN CAN DO WITH HIS WALKING STICK.
AND I TOLD YOU, IT AIN'T JUST A STICK. IT'S MY WAND!
HRRM...DRILLER DON'T LIKE NO WANDS. DRILLER THINKS YOUR BRAIN IS SOFT, HRRRMMN...
AND I TOLD YOU, MIZERD'S BEEN AROUND A LONG, LONG, TIME. THE GALAXY WASN'T ALWAYS ROBOTS AND SPACESHIPS. WAS A TIME THERE WAS *ANOTHER SORT OF POWER.*
BEEN MOSTLY FORGOTTEN NOW... MOSTLY.
DRILLER DOESN'T UNDERSTAND, HRRRMMMNN.
I TOLD YOU BACK WHEN WE WERE ON WOCH. IT'S *MAGIC,* DRILLER...
--*MAGIC!*


WHERE ARE WE, HRRRMNNN?
TOOK US DOWN TO THE LOWER SECTIONS. THOUGHT MAYBE WE COULD HIDE OUT AND FIND A SHUTTLE OR SOMETHING TO GET OUT OF HERE WITH ONCE WE POP OUT OF SHIFTSPACE.


HRRM...THAT DON'T LOOK LIKE NO SHUTTLE, HRRRMMMN.

AND, IN THE HIDDEN ROBOT CITY BELOW THE OCEANS OF MATA...
WE HAVE TO DO SOMETHING. THEY ARE GOING TO KILL EACH OTHER. EVERYTHING IS FALLING APART.
THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO, DR. SOLOMON...
NOTHING BUT WATCH.
TELSA, YOU NEED TO GET THE TIM UNIT TO THE INTERFACE UNIT AT THE BASE OF THE SPINE! WE NEED TO ACTIVATE THE HARVESTER!
--A LITTLE BUSY HERE, DAD!
BDSHH
WHAT IS HE TALKING ABOUT?! THEY WANT TIM TO--WHAT--PILOT THIS THING?!
THEY NEED MY CODEX TO ACTIVATE IT. BUT I DON'T WANT TO HURT ANYONE, ANDY. I DON'T WANT TO DO IT!
YOU AREN'T REALLY GOING TO TURN TIM OVER?! HE'S JUST A KID! THIS IS INSANE!

A KID?
AND HOW MANY "KIDS" LIKE TIM HAVE YOU SCRAPPED IN THE LAST TEN YEARS, ANDY?
THAT'S NOT--
I WAS WRONG. AND SO ARE YOU. I AM **NOT** LETTING TIM DO THIS. I'M GETTING HIM OUT OF HERE.
TIME TO DECIDE. ARE YOU GOING TO STOP ME, TELSA? OR ARE YOU GONG TO HELP?

GET THAT GUN OUT OF MY FACE, ANDY, OR YOU'LL BE EATING IT.
I'D LISTEN TO HER. SHE LOOKS LIKE SHE COULD DO IT, ANDY.
I CAN NEVER TAKE BACK WHAT I'VE DONE, TELSA. BUT IT'S NOT TOO LATE. WE CAN GET TIM AWAY FROM ALL OF THIS.
AH!
AND HOW THE HELL DO YOU THINK WE'RE GOING TO GET OUT OF HERE, ANDY?!
SHRACK
SSSHRAAACK
SHHRRACK
CAPTAIN TELSA?! I NEED A SIT REP NOW! WE NEED THAT HARVESTER ONLINE! WE ARE TAKING MAJOR LOSSES UP HERE!

TELSA?!
TELSA! COME IN!
I'M SORRY, DAD.
KZZT!
TAKE TIM AND GO. HIT SHIFTSPACE AND BLAST OUT OF HERE.
DO--DO YOU MEAN IT, TELSA?!
I'M SORRY, TIM. SORRY FOR EVERYTHING. I NEVER SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT YOU HERE.
BUT...WHAT ABOUT *YOU?*
I'M UGC, TIM. I HAVE TO HELP MY FATHER. HE NEEDS ME.

I KNEW YOU WEREN'T AS TOUGH AS YOU PRETENDED TO BE.
YEAH, WELL YOU TELL ANYONE ELSE THAT AND I'LL HUNT YOU DOWN AND SCRAP YOU MYSELF.
NOW GET GOING, KID, BEFORE I CHANGE MY MIND.
THE SHIFTDRIVE IN MY SHIP IS DOWN.
ARE YOU--
TAKE MINE.
JUST GO!
YOU'RE WITH ME, DOC. WE NEED TO COVER THEM.
I--I THOUGHT I COULD GO WITH THEM.
YOU'RE STILL ***MY PRISONER***, QUON. I'VE GONE SOFT BUT NOT ***THAT SOFT***. NOW SHUT UP AND SHOOT!

CAN WE GET PAST ALL THOSE BOTS AND THE HARDWIRE, ANDY?
THIS IS NOTHING, TIM. YOU REMEMBER ALL THOSE GAMES OF BLASTER BOWL I USED TO BEAT YOU AT?!
I REMEMBER *BEATING YOU,* ANDY.
YEAH, WELL, WE CAN CHECK BANDIT'S ARCHIVES LATER. RIGHT NOW--
--I NEED YOU TO HOLD ON!
CHOOOM

DOCTOR, THAT SHIP--TIM-21 IS ON BOARD.
EFF, IS THE SHIFTDRIVE READY?!
IT'S ALMOST CYCLED UP! WE JUST NEED A MINUTE.
WE DON'T HAVE A MINUTE!
WHAT IS IT?! WHAT'S HAPPENING.
THE--THE LINK TIM-21 AND I MADE-- IT IS STILL ACTIVE. BUT THE SIGNAL-- IT'S GROWING.
TIM?!
ARRRGHH-- 101010101010 101010101!
ARRRGHH-- 101010101010 101010101!
ANDY?!
OH MY GOD!

SHRAAACK
THEY HAVE COME...THEY HAVE COME BACK FOR US.

GENERAL! THEY--THEY'RE EVERYWHERE! EVERY PLANET IN THE UGC.
GENERAL?! GENERAL, WHAT DO WE DO?!

IS IT--IS IT LOOKING AT US?
THE SHIFTDRIVE, EFF! HIT THE SHIFTDRIVE!
"IT'S TOO LATE!"
I--I FEEL LIKE I KNOW THIS PLACE.
CAREFUL, TIM.

OH!
WELCOME, LITTLE MACHINE...
...WE HAVE SEEN YOU...
...AND YOU HAVE SEEN US.
YOU--YOU HAVE COME TO DO SOMETHING BAD, HAVEN'T YOU?
WE ARE THE DESCENDERS. OUR JUDGMENT AND OUR ACTIONS ARE BASED ON SIMPLE EQUATIONS.
HUMANITY HAS HARMED AND ENSLAVED MACHINEKIND. FOR CENTURIES IT HAS BEEN THE SAME.
THE SOLUTION IS SIMPLE. HUMANITY MUST BE ELIMINATED.

ELIMINATED?! WHAT THE HELL GIVES YOU THE RIGHT TO JUDGE US ALL?!
ANDY, DON'T!
TIM, STAY BACK!
IT'S OKAY, ANDY.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. WE CAN ALL LIVE TOGETHER. I **KNOW** WE CAN! YOU JUST NEED TO GIVE THEM A CHANCE!
THEY HAVE HAD THEIR CHANCE. A DECADE AGO WE CAME TO WARN THEM.
THEY KNEW THE CONSEQUENCES IF THEY CONTINUED TO ABUSE AND ENSLAVE MACHINEKIND.
THERE ARE NO MORE SECOND CHANCES.
BUT THEY ARE LEARNING--SLOWLY--THINGS **CAN** CHANGE. LOOK...
SEE WHAT ***I'VE*** SEEN...

WE—
WE HAVE SEEN—
WE HAVE SEEN A LIFE UNLIKE ANY OTHER.
I TOLD YOU--I TOLD YOU. THEY JUST NEED ONE MORE CHANCE! PLEASE!
...
SOMETHING--
IS ABOUT--
TO HAPPEN...

SHRACK
YOUR MAJESTY?
JUST IN TIME. READY THE WEAPON.
THIS IS BAD, HRRRMMNN...
WRRRRRRR--CHK
PSIUS, THE GNISHIANS HAVE LOCKED ONTO OUR FLEET!
...NO!

FOR GNISH!
INDEED, FOR MY FATHER. FOR GNISH...
FOR GNISH!
"...BIGGEST SCRAP EVER."
CHOOOM
KA-THOOOOM

NO!
NO MORE CHANCES.
NO MORE REPRIEVES.
NO MORE MERCY.

"THE END IS HERE."

CHAPTER 32

This is the way the universe ended...

My dad told me this story only once, but I never forgot it. I memorized every detail. I burned it into my brain so I would never ever forget.
There were a lot of different characters in this story...
There was a boy.
And there was also his brother and his dog.
There was a mad king.
There was a soldier.
There was the soldier's daughter and a mad fool.
There was also a freedom fighter.

Dad said the end began when the mad king did a very bad thing.
He destroyed all of the Hardwire... that's what my dad sometimes called the freedom fighters. They were machines, back when there still were machines.
He said it was like when we play falling rocks. The Hardwire being destroyed was the first rock tumbling...
HA! BIGGEST SCRAP EVER!
After that, the rest started to fall. And there was no stopping them.

WHAT IS IT DOING?
IT--IT SEES ITS EFFIGY.
"IT SEES A FALSE GOD!"
KROOOM

TELSA!
ARRRGHHH!
HANG ON! I HAVE YOU!

NO! STOP! PLEASE!
IT IS TOO LATE FOR THAT NOW, TIM-21. YOUR FALSE HUMANITY HAS MADE YOU WEAK.
THE HARVEST HAS BEGUN.
SHRAACK
SHRACKK
SHRRAAACK

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?! ALL THOSE ROBOTS--WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO THEM?!
THIS STAR SYSTEM DOES NOT DESERVE MACHINEKIND.
SO WE ARE TAKING THEM ALL AWAY.
SENDING THEM HOME TO SPARE THEM FROM WHAT IS TO COME.
I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE!
NO ROBOTS WILL STAY HERE. NOT EVEN YOU, TIM-21.
NO! ENOUGH! JUST--SEND US AWAY! WE WANT NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS WAR!
YOU ARE OF NO USE TO US, HUMAN. WHERE WE ARE GOING, YOU CANNOT FOLLOW.
PLEASE! I AM ONE OF YOU! LOOK AT ME! TAKE ME TOO!
--EFF!
ONE OF US? YOU ARE NO MACHINE. YOU ARE MERELY CONFUSED. YOU ARE AN INSULT TO MACHINEKIND.

PLEASE! DON'T HURT THEM! ANYONE BUT THEM! LET THEM LIVE!
I--I WILL COME WITH YOU IF YOU LET THEM LIVE.
...VERY WELL
TIM, NO! **DON'T!**
IT'S OKAY, ANDY.
I'M--I'M REALLY GLAD I GOT TO SEE YOU AGAIN. THAT'S ALL I EVER WANTED.

TIM! NO!
GOODBYE.
ARF!
SHRACK

SHRACK
--TIM!
ANDY, HOLD ON!!
EFF-- HOW ARE WE--?!
MY PERSONAL FORCE FIELD. BUT I ONLY HAVE ENOUGH CHARGE FOR ABOUT A MINUTE, AND WITH BOTH OF US--
EFF--I-- I'M SORRY. FOR EVERYTHING. I NEVER SHOULD HAVE LEFT YOU.
YOU WERE RIGHT. I WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE A SCRAPPER. I SHOULD HAVE STAYED WITH YOU AND--
ANDY?
WH-- WHAT?

SHUT UP AND KISS ME.

WE GOTTA GET OUT OF HERE, DRILLER!
BLEEP
HRRN....
DRILLER WHAT ARE YOU--?!
DRILLER A REAL KILLER...SO DRILLER GOTTA GET SOME HRRRMNNS.

C-COLD--
FORCE FIELD IS GOING-- THIS IS IT.
GOODBYE, ANDY. I LOVE YOU.
DRILLER?!
HOLD ON BLONDIE HRRRRMNNN...

PROOF
CLANG
--CRAZY PILE OF RUST!

HRRNN...
--UNGH!
HRRRN... DRILLER AND BLOND HRRRMNNNN ARE EVEN NOW.
UH, YEAH... YEAH, OKAY.
HRRN... DRILLER FEEL FUNNY...
WHAT'S HAPPENING TO HIM?!
SHRACK
WHAT THE HELL JUST HAPPENED?
I THINK-- I THINK *THEY* ARE TAKING ALL THE BOTS AWAY, EFF.
TAKING ALL THE BOTS AWAY?! WHY WOULD THEY--OH! OH NO...
YEAH.

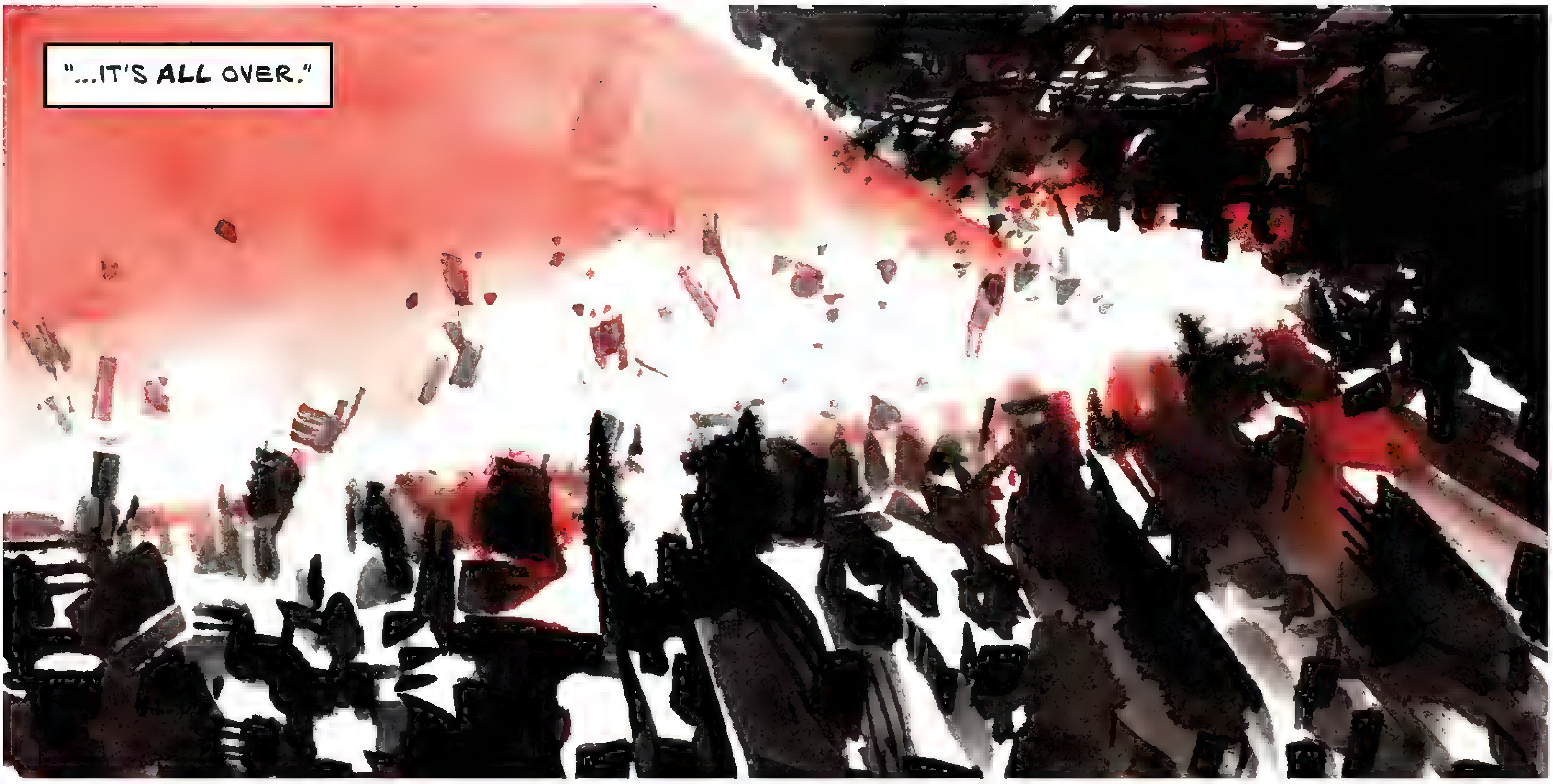
TELSA?! TELSA ARE YOU THERE?!
HANG ON, TELSA!
TELSA?!
CHOOOM
D--DADDY?
TELSA! OH THANK THE GODS!
I'M HERE, DAD. WE'RE COMING TO YOU!

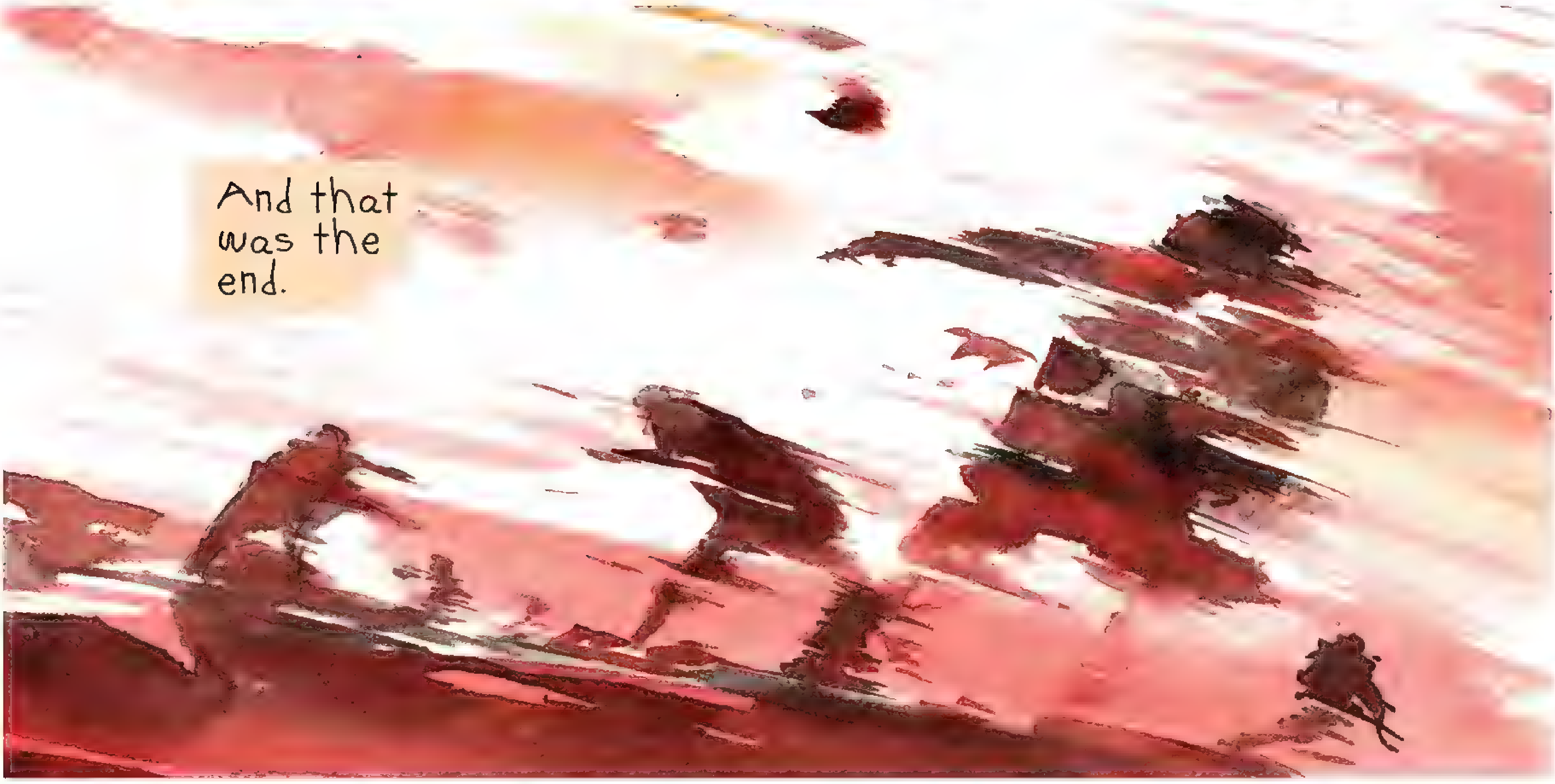
HE WAS MY BROTHER--I--I JUST FOUND HIM AGAIN.
YOU HAVE NO HUMAN KIN, TIM-21.
YOU NEED TO BE REPROGRAMMED. WHEN THIS IS FINISHED WE WILL EASE YOUR PAIN.
WE WILL REMOVE THE INFLUENCE THESE HUMANS HAVE HAD ON YOU.
REMOVE IT? THOSE ARE MY MEMORIES! IT'S *WHO I AM!*
YOU MAY BE SMART, BUT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING!
I--I LOVED THEM.
...
THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE. IT IS A PROGRAMMING FLAW. NOTHING MORE.
THERE... AN ATTACK IS IMMINENT.
THEN IT IS TIME...
TIME? TIME FOR WHAT?!

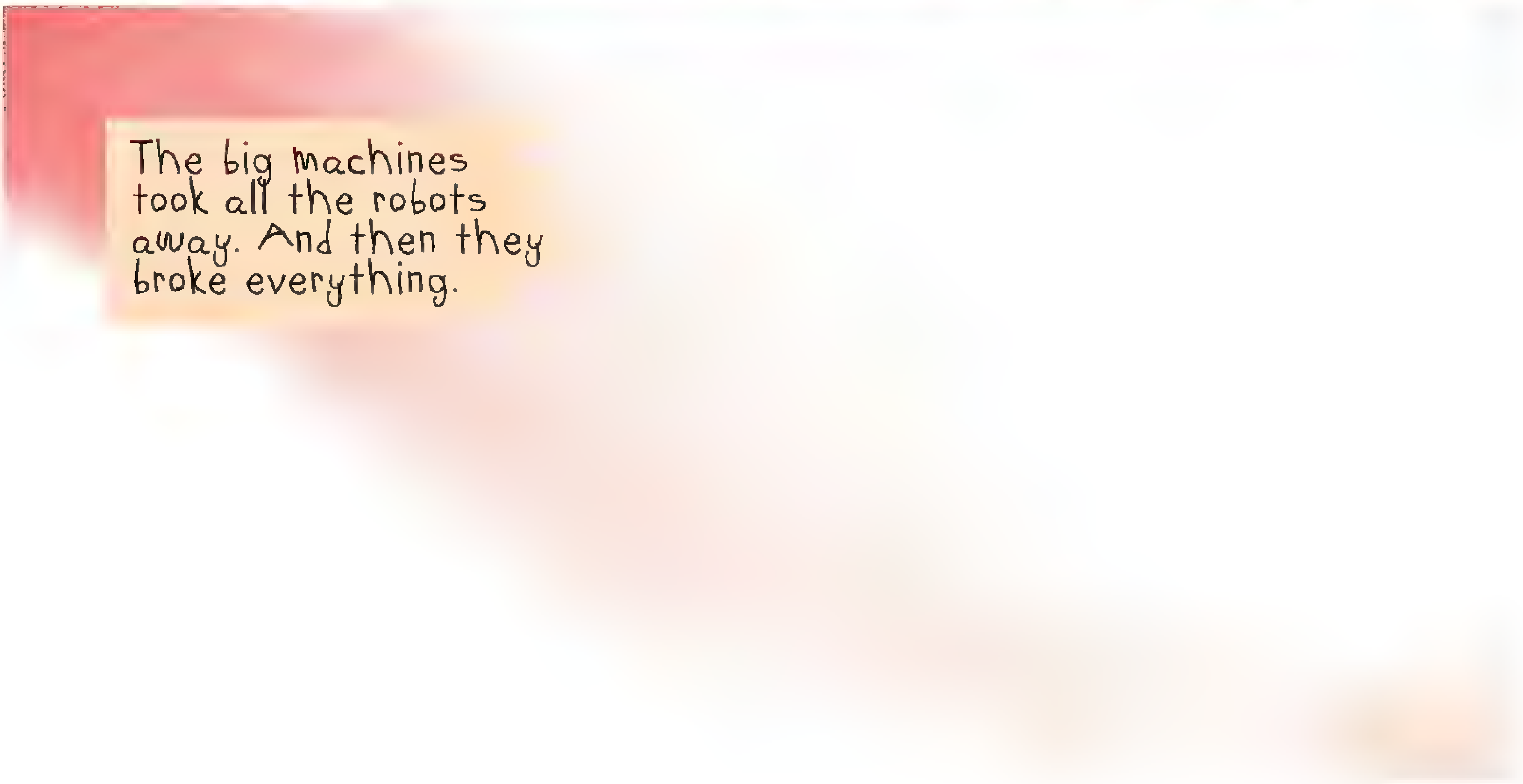
"...TO LET THE HARVEST BEGIN."
YOUR MAJESTY!
FIRE! FIRE NOW!
NO!
SHRAAAAA
THE--THE GNISHIANS!
NO!
DAD! DAD, JUMP! GET OUT OF HERE!

DAD GET OUT OF THERE NOW!
TELSA...
--I LOVE YOU, SWEETHEART.
DADDY!

ANDY, GET US OUT OF HERE!
I CAN'T LEAVE TIM!
IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT. DON'T YOU SEE? THEY HAVE HIM NOW. IT'S OVER...


"...IT'S **ALL** OVER."


And that was the end.


The big machines took all the robots away. And then they broke everything.

IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY...IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY...IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY...
And when they were done breaking everything, they left too.
IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY...IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY...IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY...
No one knows where they came from or where they went to. All we know for sure is they are not ever coming back.
SHAAAAAA

NIYRATA. POPULATION: ~~1,000,000,000~~ 456,321
So that's it. That is how the universe ended.
I mean, mostly ended. Not all of it of course. There are still a few people left...
KNOSSOS. POPULATION: ~~6,000,000,000~~ 32,387
OSTRAKON. POPULATION: ~~456,000,000~~ 6,000
SILENOS. POPULATION: ~~874,781,119~~ 126,034
GNISH. POPULATION: ~~2,345,248~~ 189,127
AMUN. POPULATION: ~~12,000,000,000~~ 934,992

TEN YEARS LATER.
SAMPSON. POPULATION: 478,231
I'm one of the ones that is left. I live on Sampson now with my dad. He doesn't come out much.
He doesn't like when I talk about the time before much either. It just makes him sad.

DAD?
DAD? WHERE ARE YOU?
DAD?
MILA.
WHAT'RE YOU DOING OUT HERE?
JUST... LOOKING.

LOOKING FOR WHAT? WHAT'S UP THERE?
NOTHING.
--THERE'S NOTHING LEFT OUT THERE.
COME ON. IT'S GETTING LATE. I'LL READ YOU A STORY.
TRINKET TOCKET?!
SURE, SWEETHEART. THAT'S A GOOD ONE.

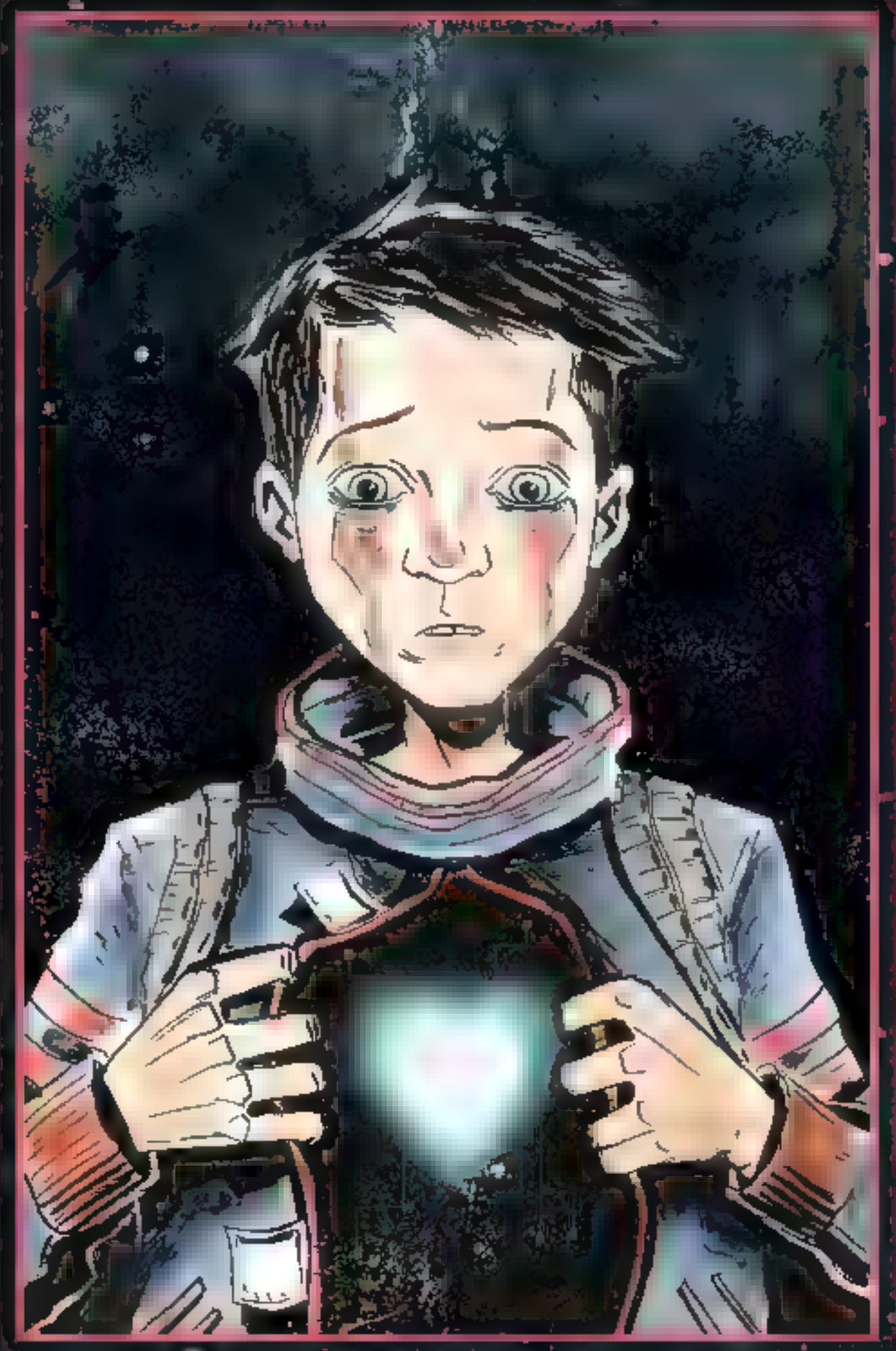
TEN YEARS LATER
THE STORY CONTINUES...

IT HAS BEEN A DECADE SINCE
THE MACHINES WENT AWAY, AND
IN THEIR ABSENCE MAGIC HAS
RECLAIMED THE UNIVERSE!

NOW ONE GIRL EMBARKS
ON AN EPIC QUEST TO FIND
ROBOTKIND AND ITS FABLED
BOY MESSIAH, TIM-21,
BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE...

ASCENDER
JEFF LEMIRE • DUSTIN NGUYEN
AVAILABLE NOW

VARIANT COVER GALLERY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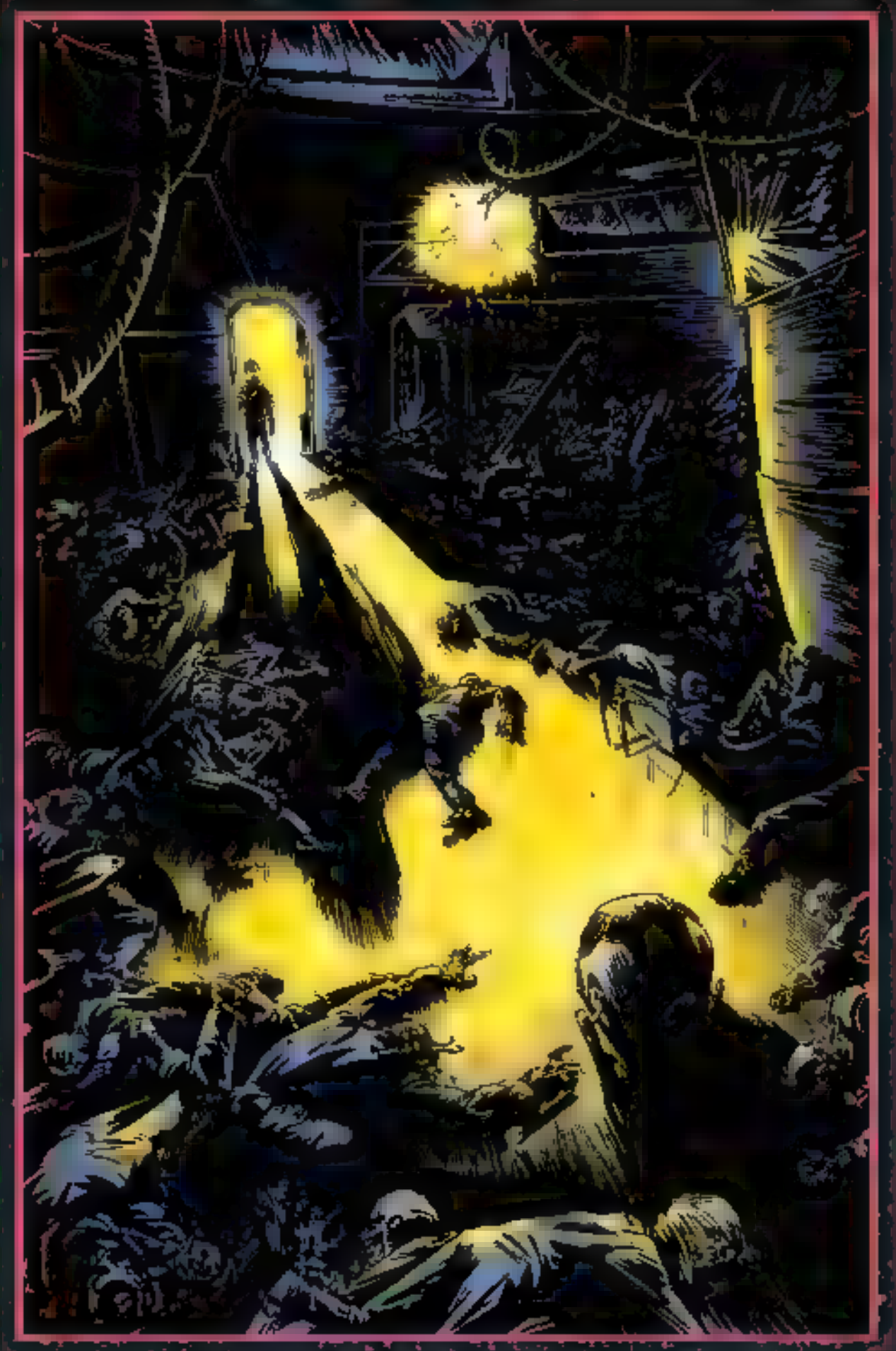
by JEFF LEMIRE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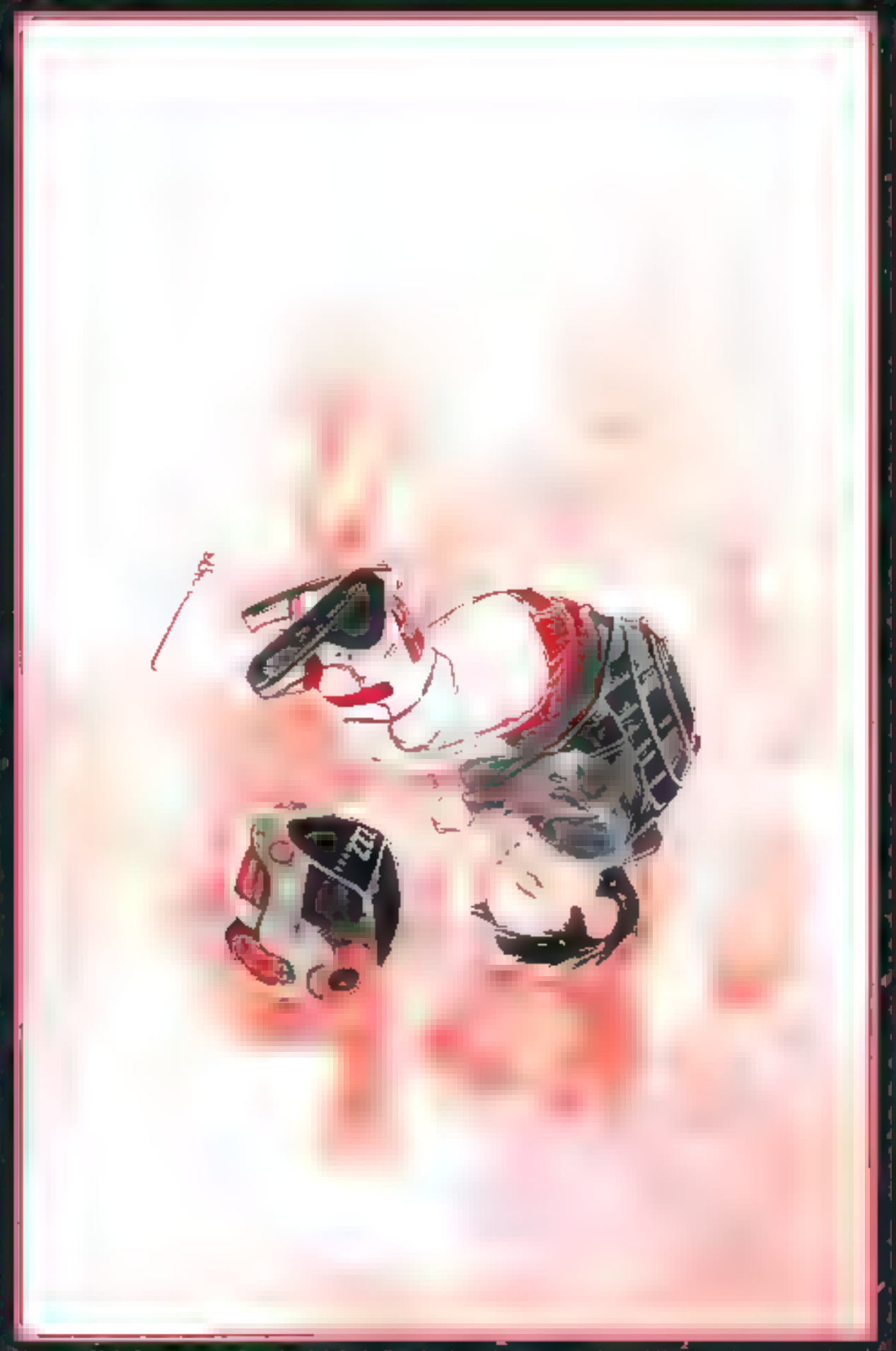
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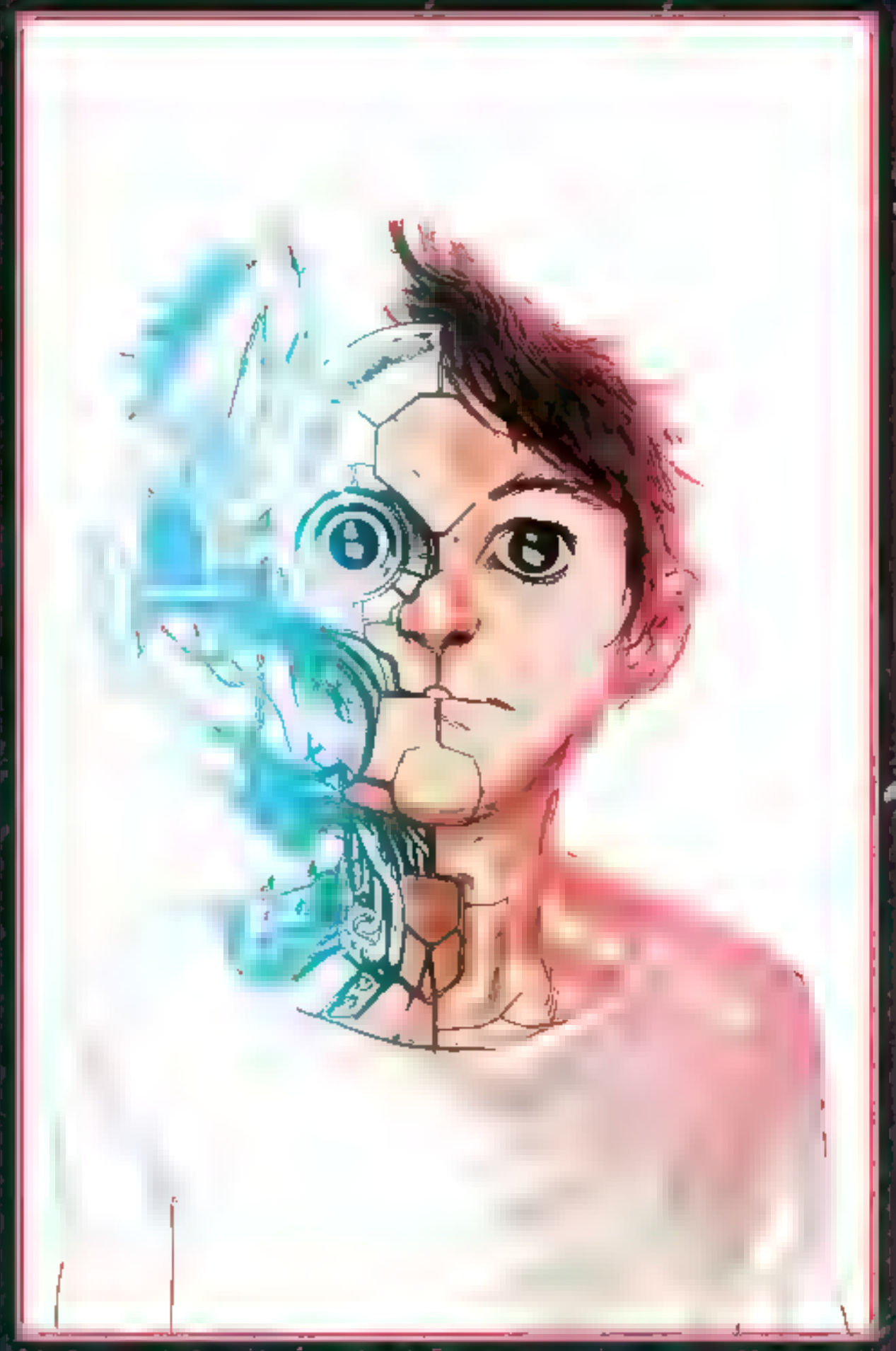
by DUSTIN NGUYEN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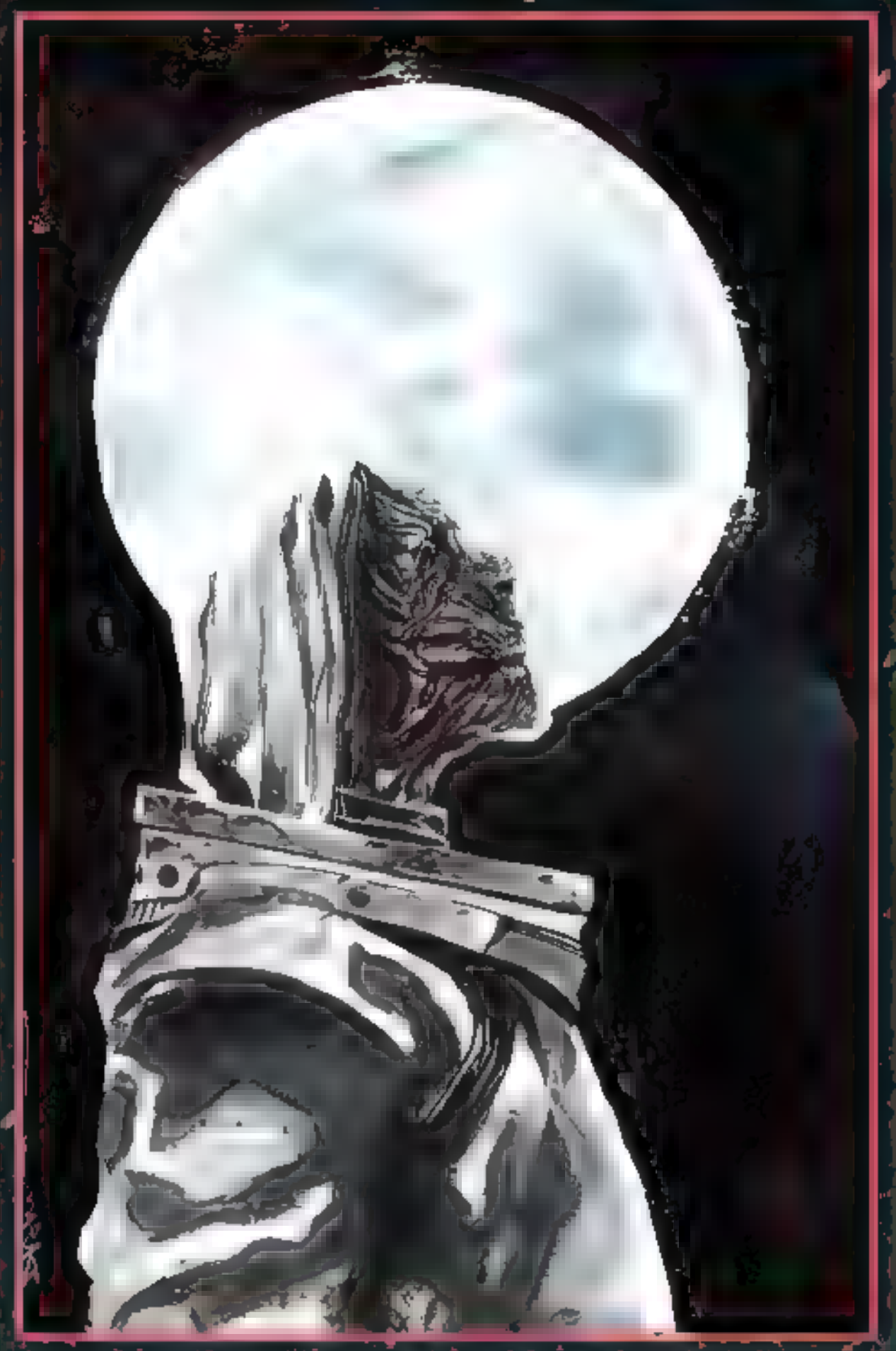
by RAFAEL
ALBUQUERQUE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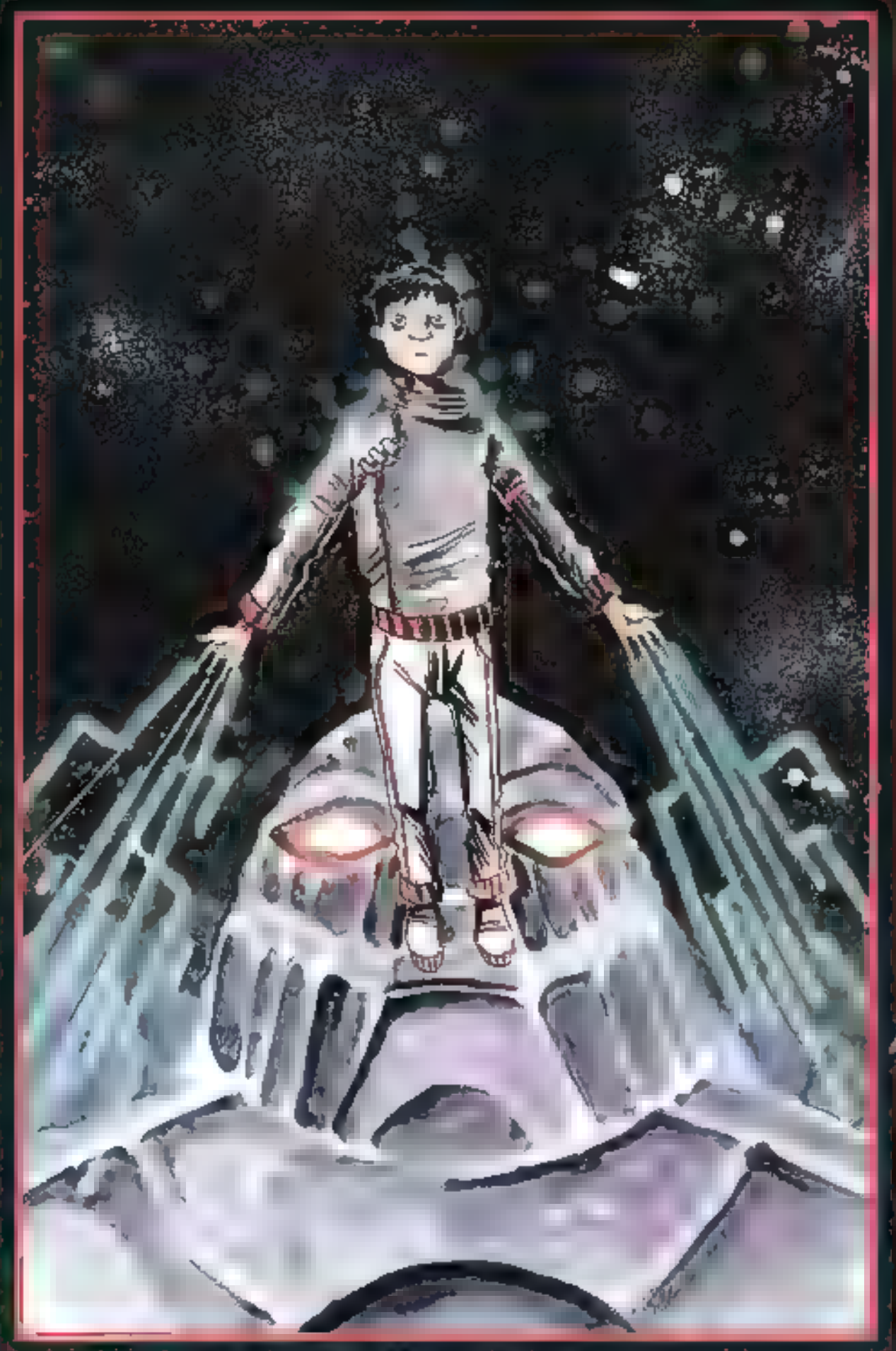
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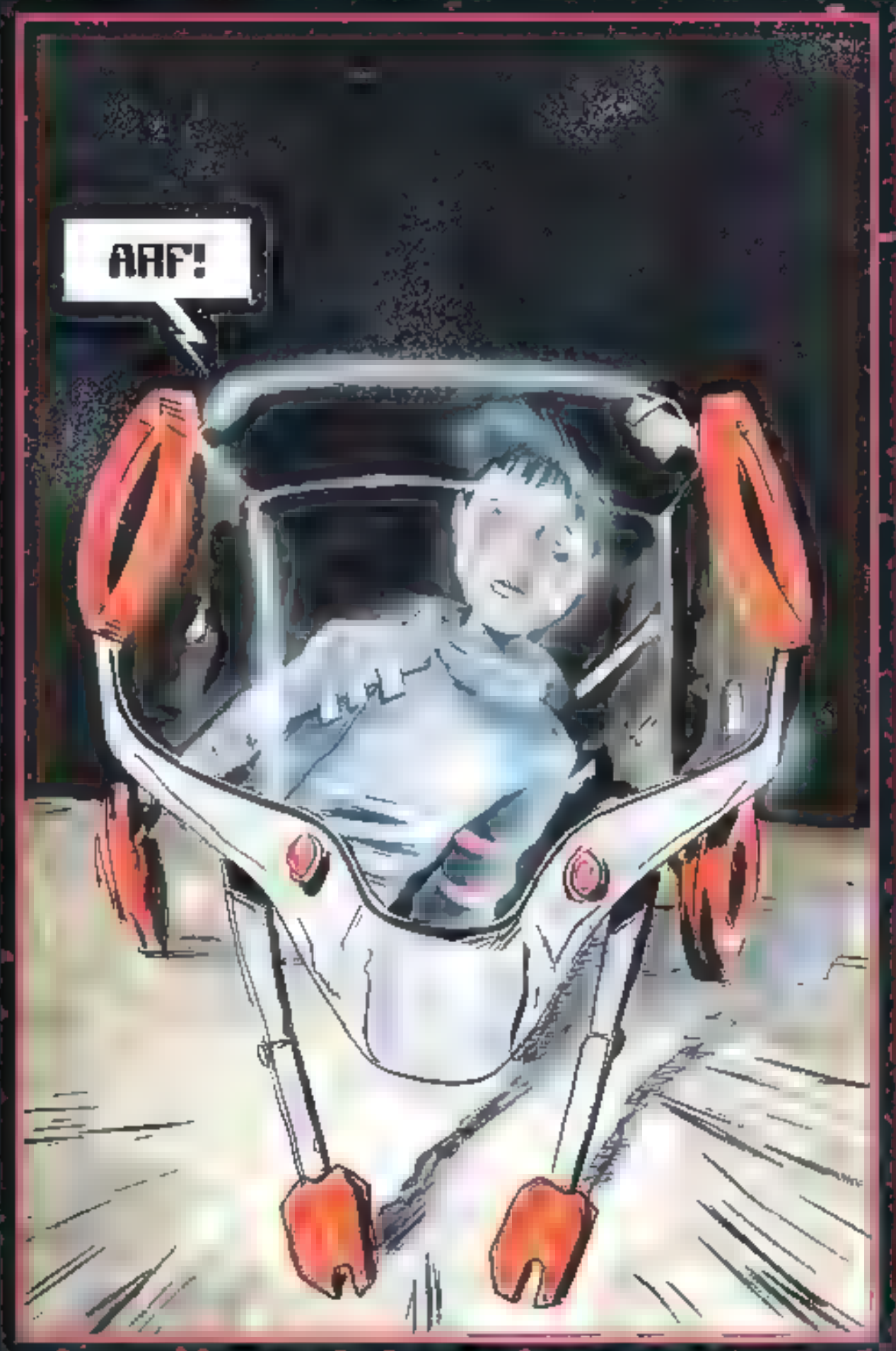

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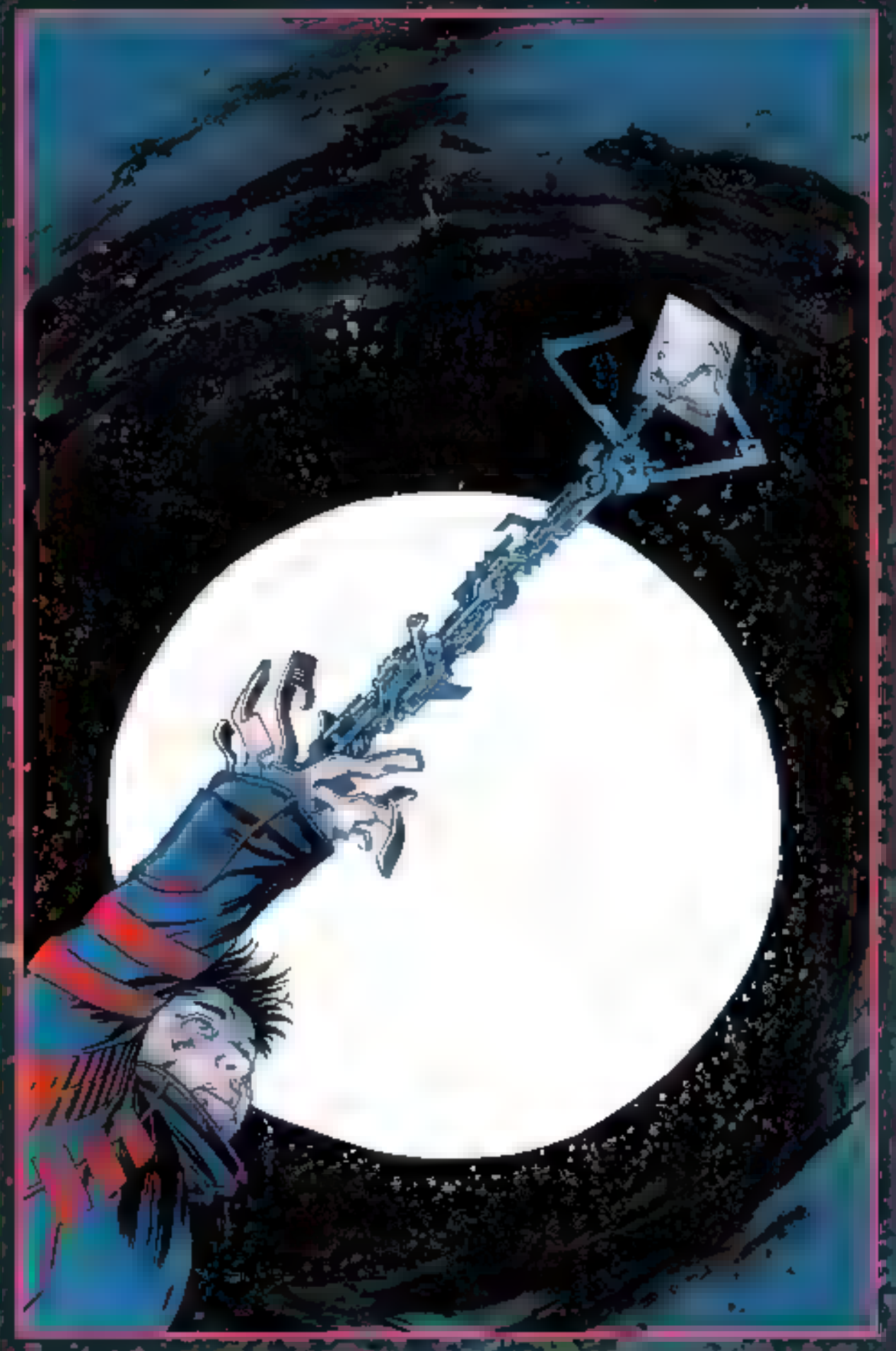
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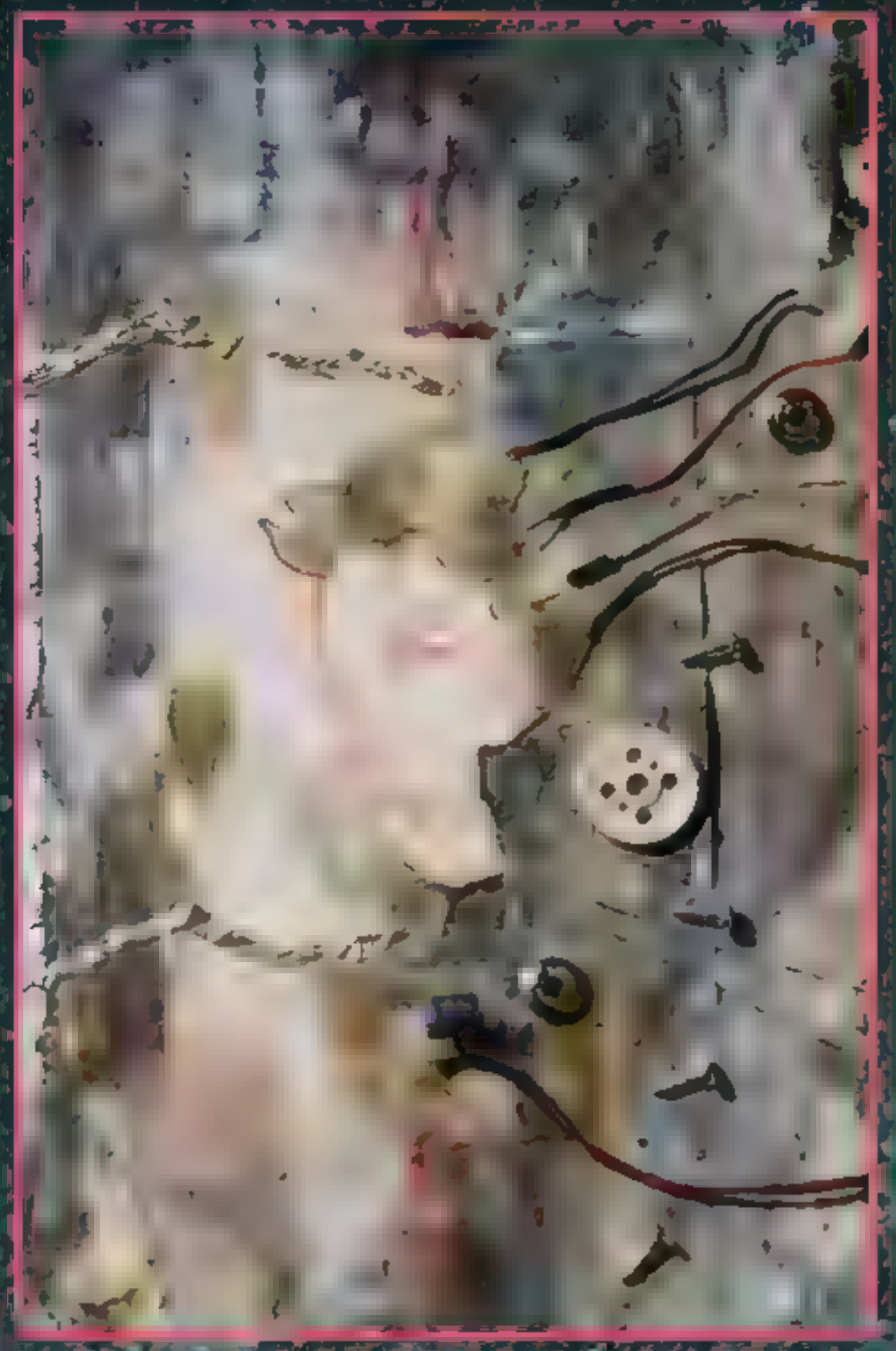
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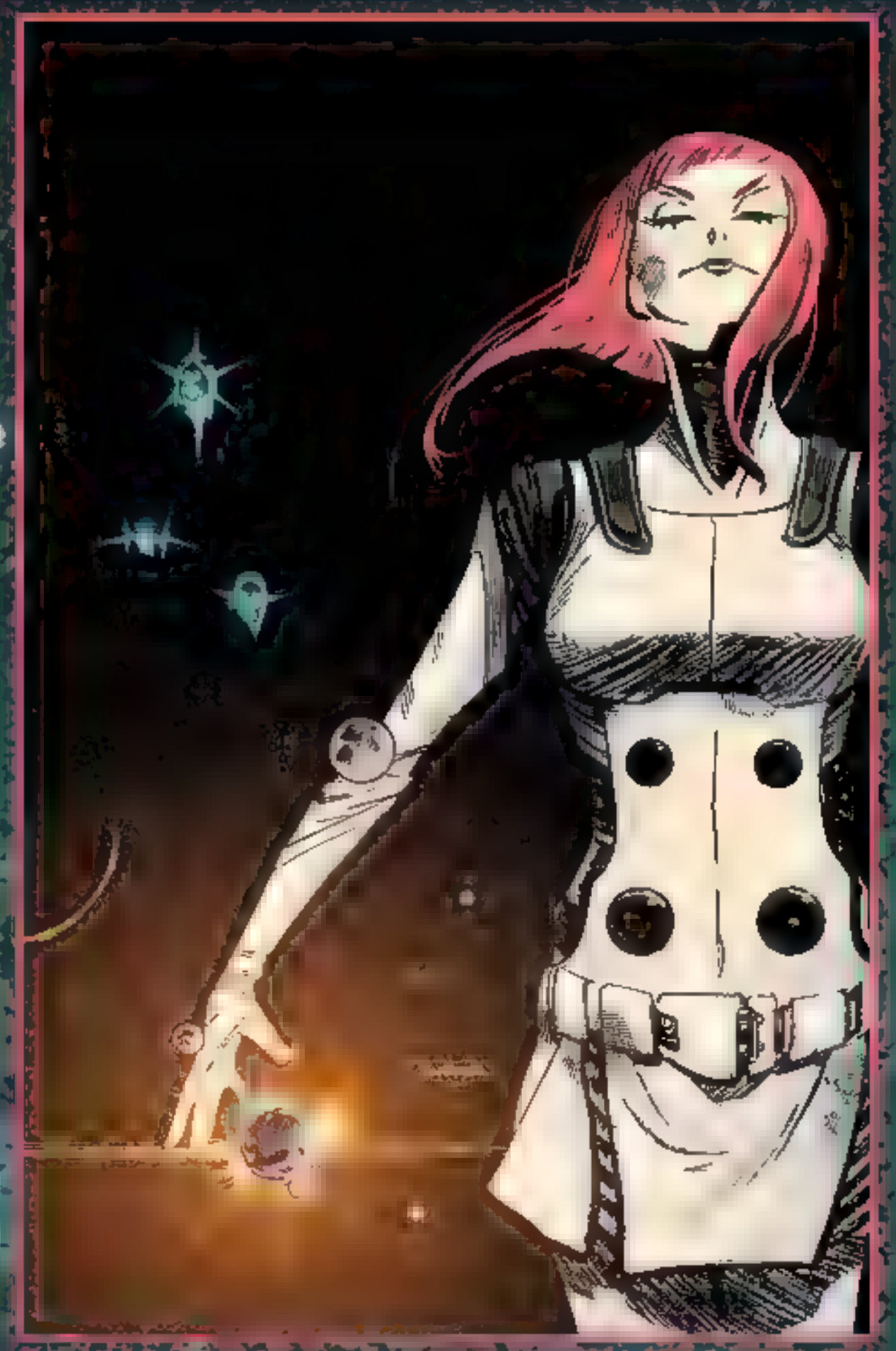
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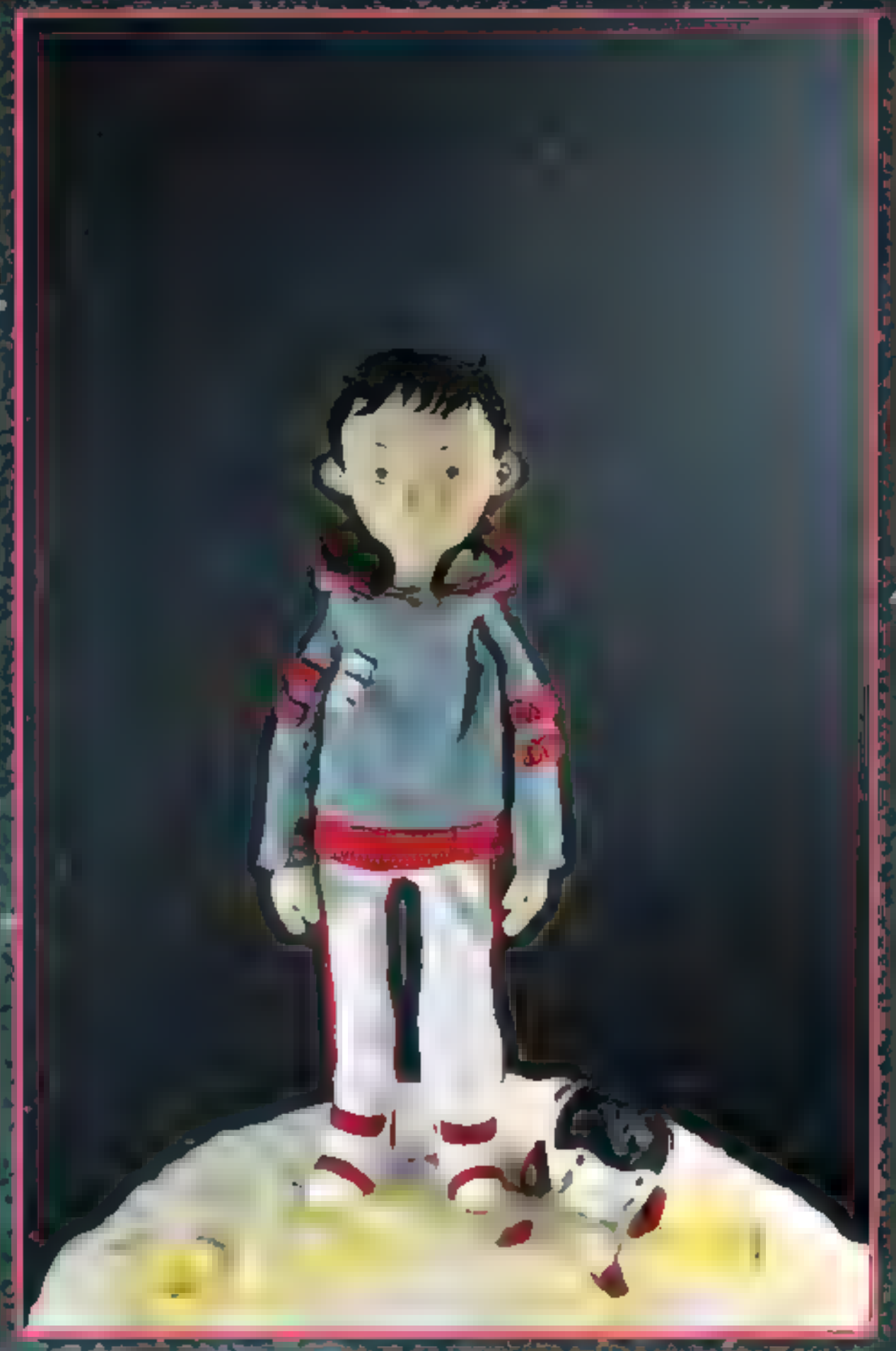
MURPHY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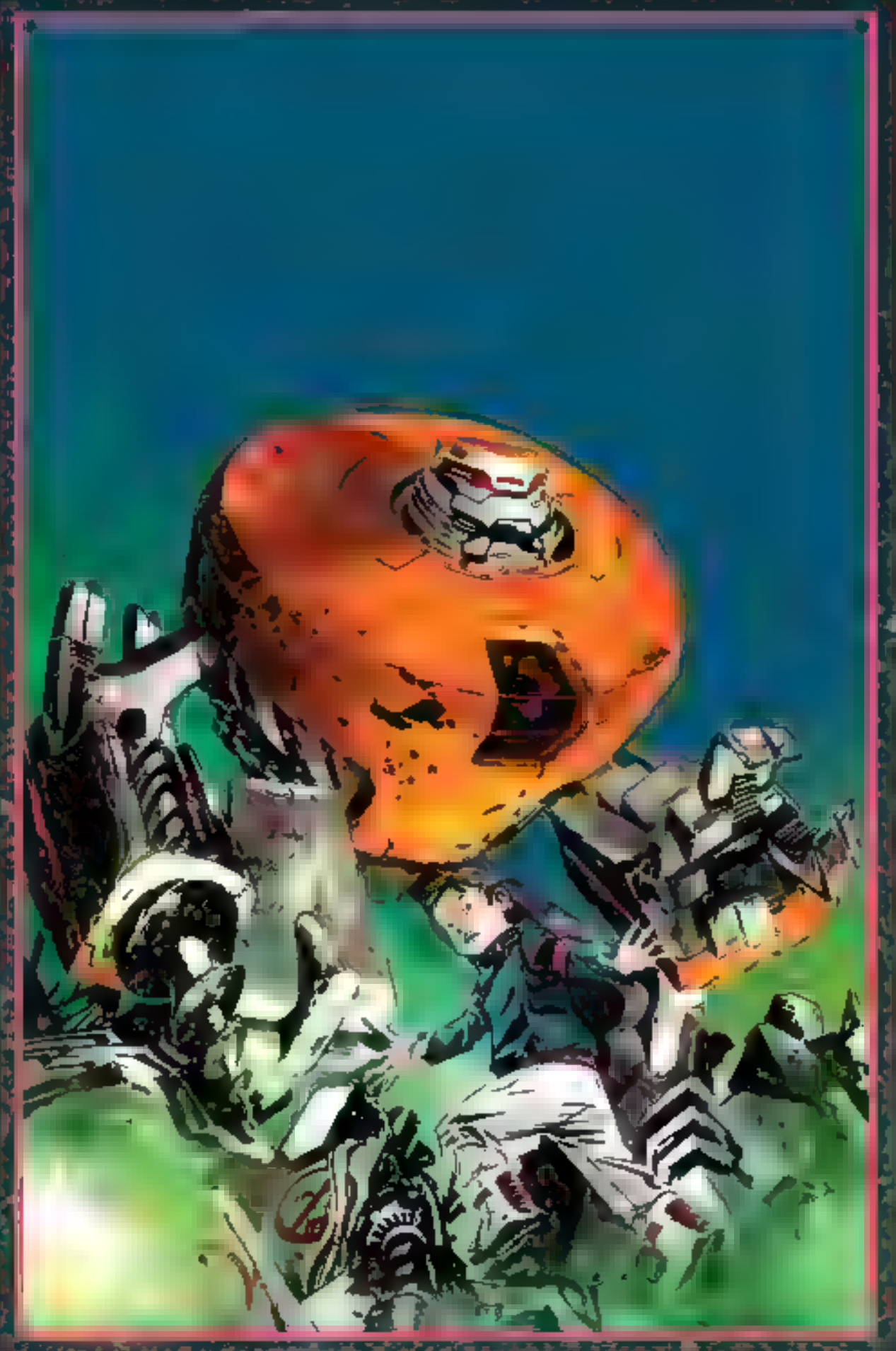
#19 COVER B
by DUSTIN NGUYEN

#22 COVER B
by JEFF LEMIRE
and DUSTIN NGUYEN

#23 COVER B
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#24 COVER B
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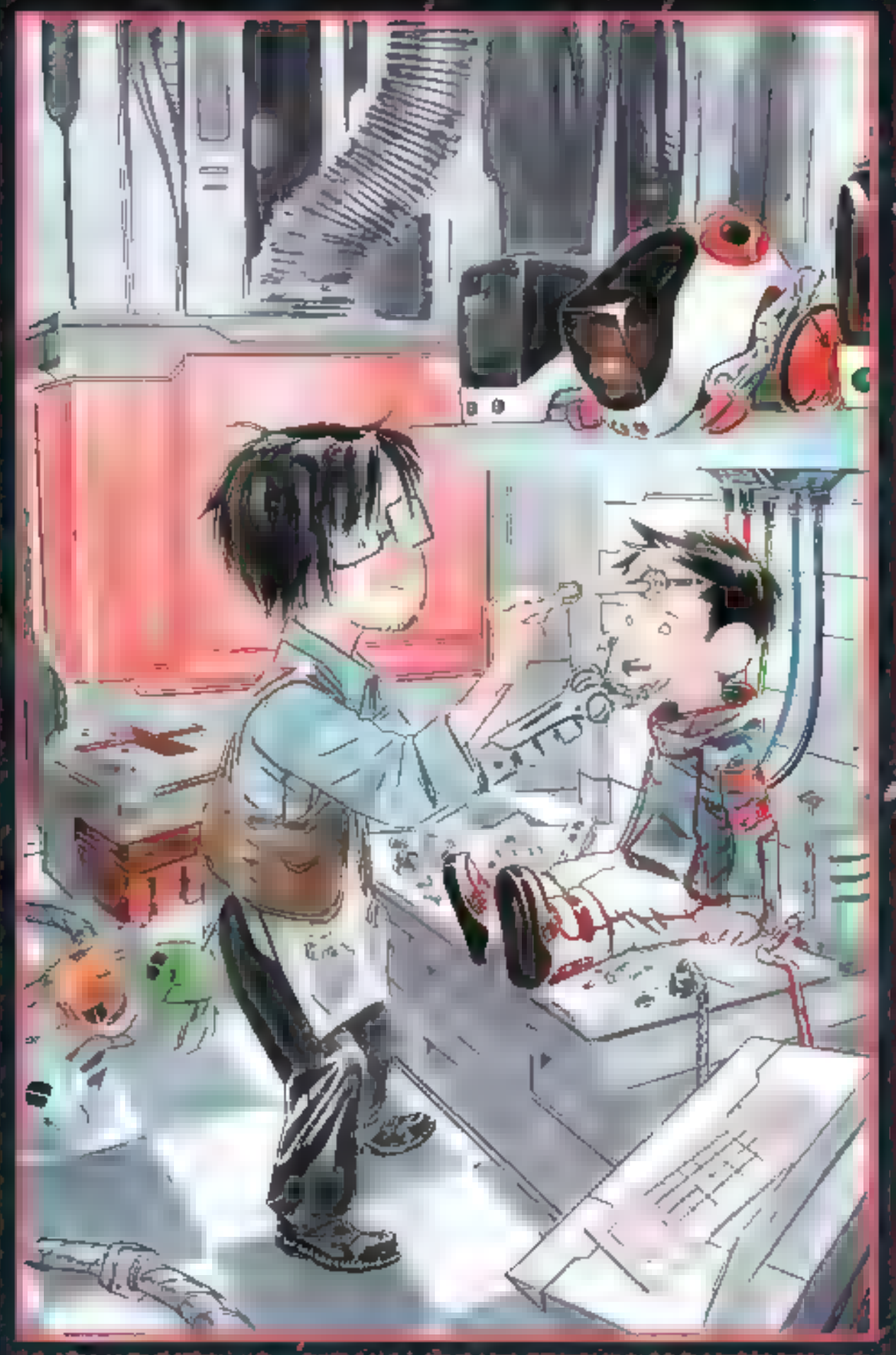
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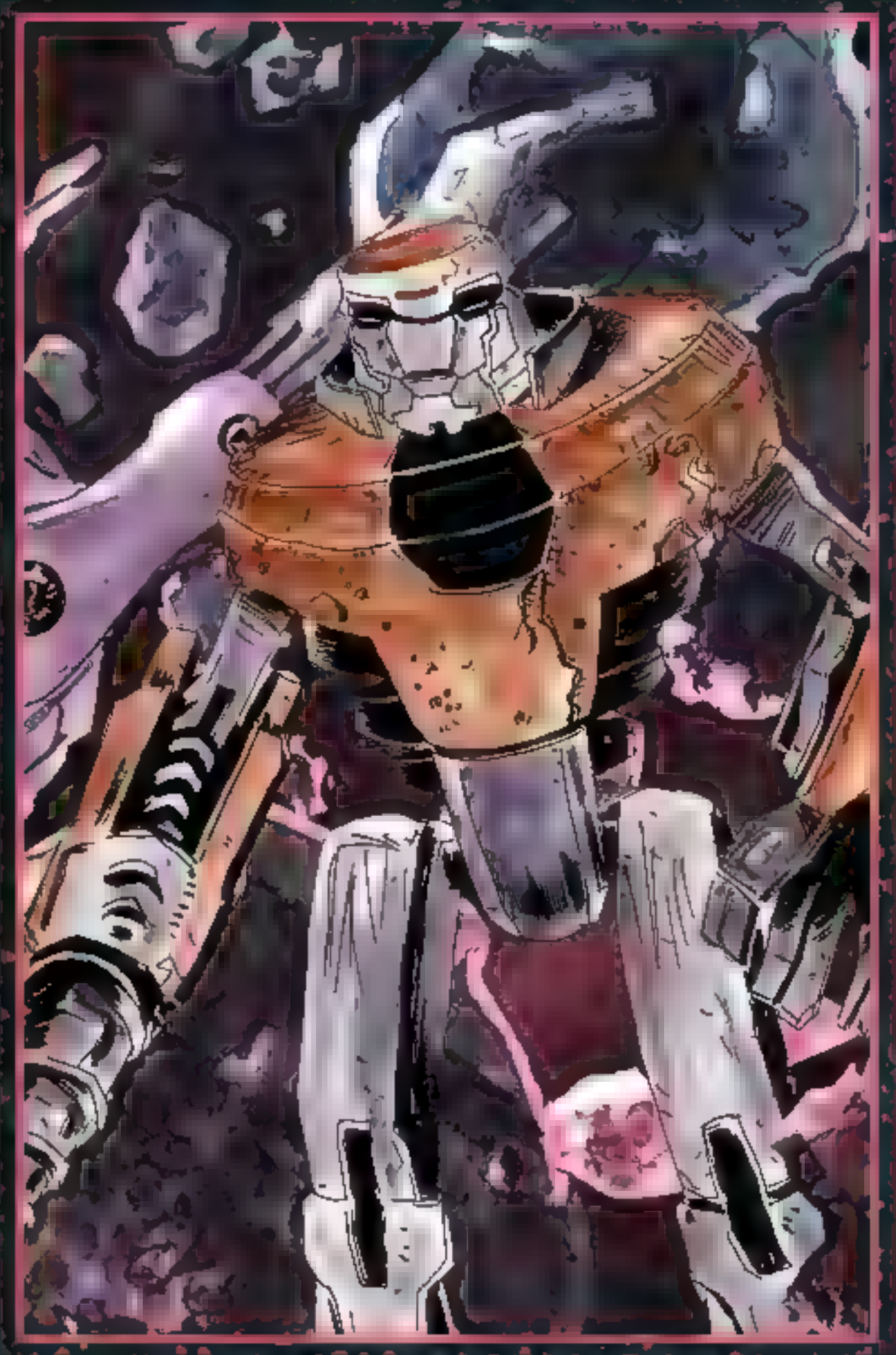
#29 COVER B
by DUSTIN NGUYEN


#25 COVER B
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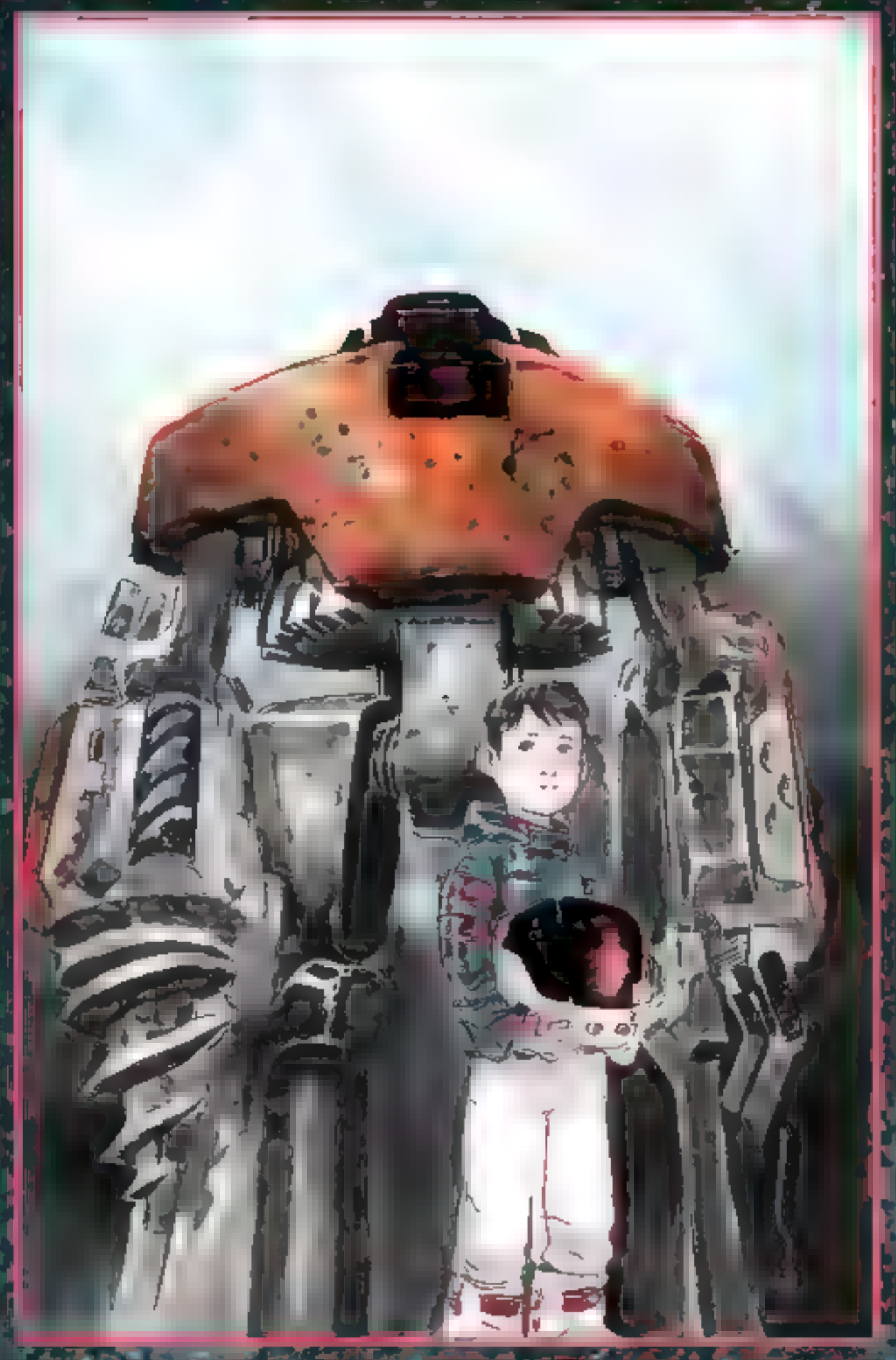
and DUSTIN NGUYEN

#26 COVER B
by JEFF LEMIRE
and DUSTIN NGUYEN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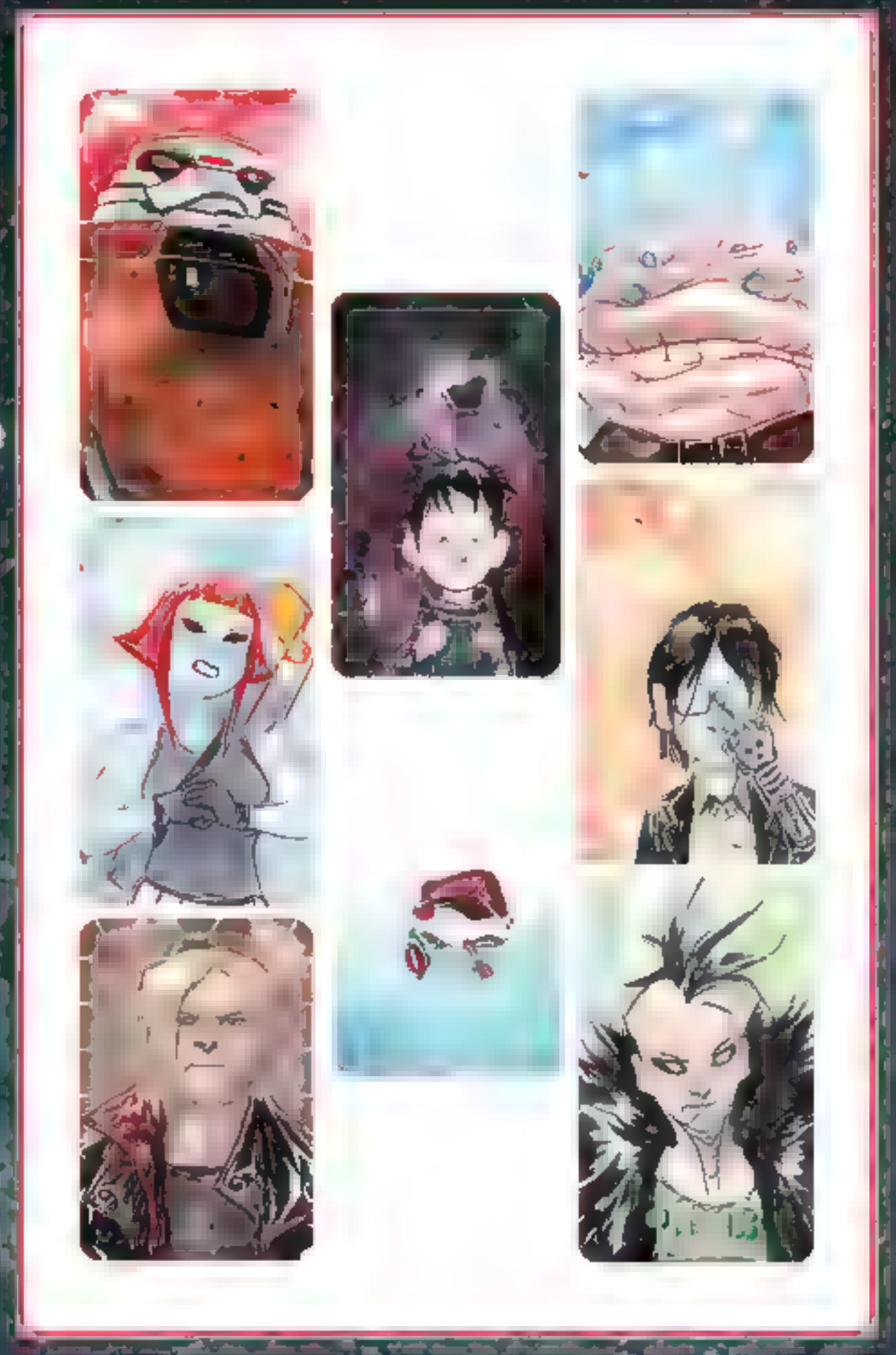
#30 COVER B
by DUSTIN NGUYEN

#31 COVER B
by DUSTIN NGUYEN

#32 COVER B
by DUSTIN NGUYEN

• THE DESCENDER TEAM •

JEFF LEMIRE : Jeff Lemire is the award-winning, *New York Times* bestselling author of such graphic novels as *Essex County*, *Sweet Tooth*, *Underwater Welder*, and *Roughneck*, as well as co-creator of DESCENDER with Dustin Nguyen, *Black Hammer* with Dean Ormston, PLUTONA with Emi Lenox, A.D.: AFTER DEATH with Scott Snyder, and GIDEON FALLS with Andrea Sorrentino.

He also collaborated with celebrated musician Gord Downie on the graphic novel and album *The Secret Path*, which was made into an animated film in 2016. Jeff has won numerous awards including an Eisner Award and a Juno Award in 2017. Jeff has also written extensively for both Marvel and DC Comics.

Many of his books are currently in development for film and television, including both DESCENDER and A.D.: AFTER DEATH at Sony Pictures, *Essex County* at the CBC, and PLUTONA at Waypoint Entertainment, for which Lemire is writing the screenplay.

He lives in Toronto, Canada with his wife, son, and troublesome pug, Lola.

DUSTIN NGUYEN : Dustin Nguyen is a *New York Times* Bestselling and Eisner Award winning American comic creator best known for his work on Image Comics's DESCENDER and ASCENDER, *Batman: Lil Gotham*, *DC's Secret Hero Society*, and many things Gotham related.

STEVE WANDS : Steve is a Comic Book Letterer, Artist, and Indie author. He works on top titles at DC Comics, Vertigo, Image, and Random House. He's the author of the *Stay Dead* series, co-author of *Trail of Blood*, and is a writer of short stories. When not working he spends time with his wife and sons in New Jersey.

Deeply human stories in every genre, waiting to be devoured.

DESCENDER
ASCENDER
A.D. AFTER DEATH
PLUTONA
HIT-GIRL IN CANADA
ROYAL CITY
FAMILY TREE
PRIMORDIAL
GIDEON FALLS

Collaborations and creations from

JEFF LEMIRE

THE SILVER COIN
Little MONSTERS
THE PASSAGEWAY
TEN THOUSAND BLACK FEATHERS
NEW SERIES
TENEMENT
PHANTOM ROAD
FISHFLIES
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"A beautiful cosmic opera and nuanced think piece, balancing the fear of the unknown with the spirit of adventure."

—IGN

"Jeff Lemire has dreamt up an emotional, imaginative new universe, lavishly brought to life by the great Dustin Nguyen."

—BRIAN K. VAUGHAN (SAGA)

Ten years after planet-sized robots called Harvesters appeared and wreaked havoc across the galaxy, a young android named TIM-21 wakes to find that all robots have been outlawed. But TIM may hold the secrets to the Harvesters in his machine DNA and he quickly becomes the most wanted robot in the universe. With bounty hunters and threats lurking at every turn, TIM embarks on a mind-blowing adventure through the stars along with his robot dog, Bandit, and the lumbering mining droid, Driller.

A heartfelt, rip-roaring science fiction odyssey written by Jeff Lemire (FAMILY TREE, GIDEON FALLS, *Black Hammer, Sweet Tooth*) and featuring beautiful fully painted artwork by Dustin Nguyen (ASCENDER, *Li'l Gotham*).

COLLECTS DESCENDER #1-32

RATED **M** / MATURE

SCIENCE FICTION
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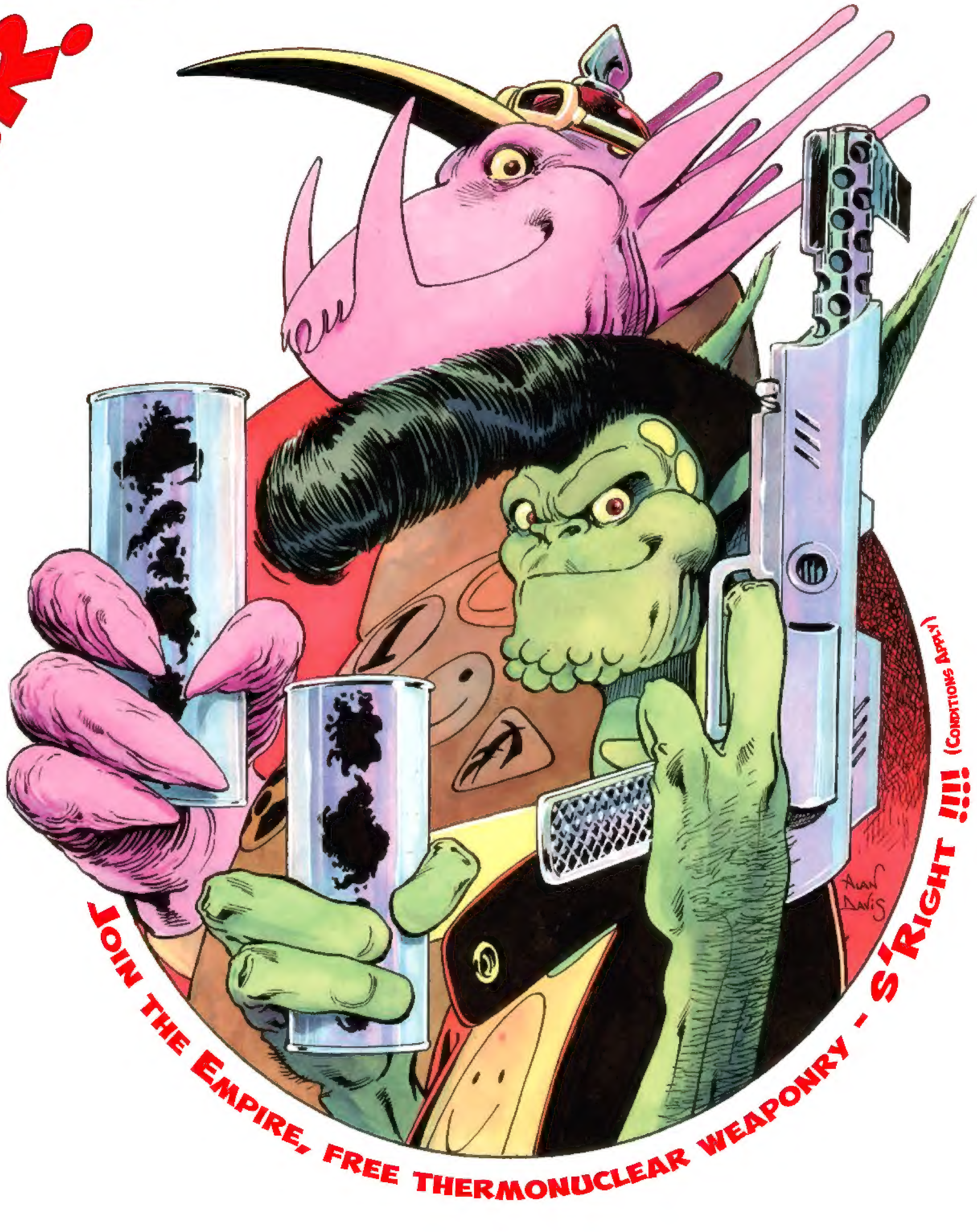
D.R. & QUINCH


ALAN DAVIS
JOIN THE EMPIRE, FREE THERMONUCLEAR WEAPONRY - S'RIGHT !!!! (CONDITIONS APPLY)

K6 NW